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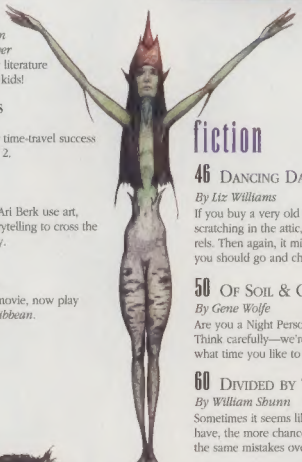
COVER: Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen) prepares to battle Sauron's evil forces in *LOTR: The Return of the King*. © 2003 Pierre Vinet/New Line Productions.



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EMMA BULL's day job is writing fantasy and science fiction; her work includes *War for the Oaks, Bone Dance* and, with Steven Burst, *Freedom and Necessity.* In her goofing-off time, she's been spotted making a fool of herself on stage at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival, romping her way through Regency and Victorian balls, and missing targets at Single Action Shooting Society events.

RESA NELSON is a freelance writer and a Clarion '85 graduate. Her fiction has been published in *Science Fiction Age, Aboriginal Science Fiction,* and several anthologies. She acted as screenwriter and/or producer for three independent short films made in the Boston area, which gave her experience ranging from running a casting call to acting as a body double. Resa is currently writing a novel based on "The Dragonslayer's Sword," a short story first published in the premiere issue of *Science Fiction Age.*

RICHARD PARKS is a longtime contributor to *Realms of Fantasy.* His first short story collection, *The Ogre's Wife: Fairy Tales for Grownups,* is now available from Obscura Press and contains several stories that were published here first.

TIM PRATT lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he edits at *Star*Line,* the journal of the Science Fiction Poetry Association, and works at *Locus* as an Assistant Editor. His short story "Little Gods" was a finalist for the 2003 Nebula Award. Visit his Web site at www.sff.net/people/timpratt.

WILLIAM SHUNN was born in Los Angeles and raised in Utah. He sold his first story in 1993 and last year was nominated for the Nebula Award. He served this year as a judge for the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, in the science fiction and fantasy category. His wedding to Laura Chavoen played in heavy rotation on the Travel Channel series "Two for Las Vegas" throughout 2002. He and his wife live in New York City.

LIZ WILLIAMS is the daughter of a conjuror and a Gothic novelist, and currently lives in Brighton, England. She has a Ph.D. in philosophy of science from Cambridge and her anticareer ranges from reading tarot cards on Brighton Pier to teaching in Central Asia. Her novel *The Ghost Sister* was published by Bantam in 2001. A *New York Times* "Notable Book" of 2001, it was nominated for the Philip K. Dick Award. A second novel, *Empire of Bones,* was published in 2002. Liz has had short fiction published in *Asimov's, Interzone, The Third Alternative,* and *Realms of Fantasy,* among others.

TERRI WINDLING, who originated and still supervises the Folkroots columns, is a six-time winner of the World Fantasy Award. She is a Consulting Editor at Tor Books, and has edited over 30 anthologies, many of them in partnership with Ellen Datlow. She won the Mythopoeic Award for her novel *The Wood Wife,* and has also published children's books, short stories, and nonfiction. This article and previous Folkroots columns can be found on her Web site: The Endicott Studio for Mythic Arts, www.endicott-studio.com.

GENE WOLFE began to write in 1956, shortly after he and his wife Rosemary were married. They needed money for a bed and stove. His first sale was "The Dead Man" to *Sir* in 1965. Since then there have been numerous stories and books, including *The Fifth Head of Cerberus, Peace, The Shadow of the Torturer, The Urth of the New Sun, There Are Doors, Nightside the Long Sun, On Blue Waters, In Green's Jungles,* and *Return to the Whorl.* His short stories have been collected in *The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories, Endangered Species,* and *Strange Travelers.* His work has been given three World Fantasy Awards, two Nebula Awards, the British Fantasy Award, the British Science Fiction Award, and the Deathrealm Award, among others. Although it has never won a Hugo Award, his work has been nominated eight times. So far.

CORRECTION

We mistakenly attributed the illustration for "In the Forest of Forgetting" (October 2003, page 54) to the wrong artist. The painting is by Melissa Ferreira. We sincerely apologize to her for our error.

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DEALER INQUIRES ARE WELCOME!

By Resa Nelson

The fall season is packed with fantasy films to enchant *all* moviegoers.

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Maybe we have Harry Potter to thank. Kudos to Frodo and his fellowship, too. It makes sense for studios to release horror films near Halloween, but it suddenly seems as if the November and December holiday season has become the default release target for fantasy films.

Throughout the history of movies, fantasy and horror movies have been too often treated like ill-favored stepchildren. "B" lists often included fantasy and horror titles, but it was rare to see an "A" list fantasy or horror film. Before the high-tech explosion that made spectacularly realistic special effects possible, a good year might have produced one or two top-notch horror or fantasy movies. Even as special effects technology boomed, a good year might have produced a handful of promising genre projects.

History proves that audiences crave escape and fantasy during turbulent times. Did the events of 9/11 and its aftermath boost the demand for fantasy books and films? Maybe. Has J.K. Rowling's success generated more interest in magic and sorcery? Yes. Has Peter Jackson's risk and vision brought traditional medieval fantasy front and center? Most definitely.

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ABOVE: Legolas and Aragorn escort Gandalf to the Stables of Edora in the third LOTR *film,* The Return of the King. *TOP: The cast of the new* Texas Chainsaw Massacre *awaits Leatherface.*

We live in an era where fantasy and horror have become more popular and accepted by the masses, not just by hardcore fans of the genres. It's happening both in literature and in movies. Maybe the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* movies primed a new generation to fall in love with reading. Likewise, the success of the Harry Potter novels has probably whetted the world's appetite for more fantasy on screen. The skyrocketing success of fantasy could be the result of movies and novels working in tandem to meet audiences' hunger to escape to worlds more magical than our own.

Whether it's a fluke or a new trend, the next few months usher in a wave of movies with high concepts, Oscar-winning actors and directors, and big budgets. For once, fantasy fans may have to pick and choose … or just go see them all.

The fall season kicks off with a remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (New Line Cinema) on

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LEFT TOP AND BOTTOM: Neo (Keanu Reeves) and friends prepare for war in The Matrix Revolutions, *the much anticipated close to the cinema trilogy. BELOW TOP: Did she or didn't she? Halle Berry goes psycho in* Gothika. *BELOW BOTTOM: Leatherface is nastier than ever in the new version of* The Texas Chainsaw Massacre.

October 17. The original version, a low-budget film directed by Tobe Hooper (TV's *Taken*, *Dark Skies*) and released in 1974, revived the horror genre and influenced classics ranging from the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series to *The Blair Witch Project*. The first *Massacre* began with Sally. She leads a group of fellow teens to investigate damage done to the graveyard where her grandfather is buried. They pick up a hitchhiker, who they quickly ditch when he turns violent. Sally and her friends arrive at a house that ironically is the home of the violent hitchhiker and his equally violent family.

Both the new and the original *Massacre* are based loosely on the real-life crimes of Ed Gein, which also influenced *Psycho* and *The Silence of the Lambs*. The new film focuses on a group of friends driving through a rural Texas community on their way to Mexico. They pick up a hitchhiker, who is the survivor of the previous night's serial killing. They end up stranded at a slaughterhouse where they're hunted down by a family of cannibals. Jessica Biel (*The Rules of Attraction*, TV's *Seventh Heaven*), Eric Balfour (HBO's *Six Feet Under*), and Erica Leerhsen (*Blair Witch 2*) star.

The buzz is good for supernatural thriller *Gothika* (Warner Brothers Pictures, Dark Castle Entertainment, Columbia Pictures), which opens on October 24. Oscar winner Halle Berry (*X-Men*, *Monster's Ball*) plays Dr. Miranda Grey, a criminal psychologist who works at a mental institution. Her husband, Dr. Doug Grey (played by Charles S. Dutton of *Mimic*, *Alien 3*), is the chief administrator of the prison psychiatric ward.

One day Miranda wakes up as a patient in the institution where she works—and her recent memory has vanished. She soon learns her husband was murdered three days earlier, and she's the prime suspect. All the evidence points to Miranda as her husband's killer. Even though she has no memory of the day her husband died—

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except for remembering a strange encounter with a mysterious girl—Miranda insists she's innocent.

No one believes her. Instead, her friends and colleagues see her behavior as erratic and conclude it's an indication of the onset of insanity.

Miranda soon believes she's being used by a spirit seeking revenge, but she's not sure. After all, she's been committed to a mental institution. Maybe she really has drifted into insanity. Believing in evil spirits isn't necessarily a good sign. Is Miranda about to discover the truth of her husband's murder … or is she really losing her sanity? Penelope Cruz (*Vanilla Sky*, *Blow*) and Robert Downey, Jr. (*Chaplin*, TV's *Ally McBeal*) also star. Considering the care with which Berry selects her projects, *Gothika* could be one of the season's best picks.

November begins with *The Matrix Revolutions*, the final film in the *Matrix* trilogy. The Warner Brothers Pictures and Village Roadshow Pictures film opens on November 5. This third film makes history as the first movie to be released on the same day in movie houses and IMAX theaters alike. (Although movie audiences have clamored for IMAX releases for many years, it's only recent technology that enables feature-length films to play in IMAX theaters. Even now, running time is limited to 150 minutes.) Likewise, it's the first time two major motion picture sequels in the same series have been released theatrically in the same calendar year. Keanu Reeves, Laurence

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Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss, Hugo Weaving, and Jada Pinkett Smith all return to star.

Brothers Andy and Larry Wachowski burst onto the Hollywood scene in 1996 with their first film, the critically acclaimed thriller *Bound*. Their second film was *The Matrix* in 1999, which introduced Neo (played by Reeves), a high-tech geek who gradually learns the world we take for granted isn't what it appears to be. Instead, it's an illusion created by machines that have taken over the planet and use and manipulate human lives. Once Neo learns the truth, he joins a team fighting against the forces controlling their lives. Earlier this year, *The Matrix Reloaded* continued the story of the struggle to protect a human sanctuary called Zion. At press time, details about the final chapter in the *Matrix* saga are being kept strictly under wraps, although there is speculation that it's

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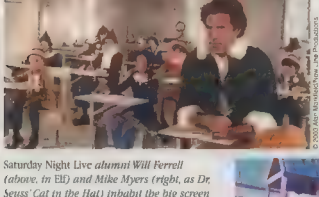
New Line Cinema releases *Elf* on November 7. Will Ferrell (*Old School*, TV's *Saturday Night Live*) stars as Buddy, a man who thinks he's one of Santa's (played by Ed Asner of *JFK*, TV's *Lou Grant*) elves. When Buddy is a baby, he crawls into Santa's toy bag and is mistakenly taken to the North Pole, where he's raised as an elf. Although Buddy is human, he doesn't live in the human world and has no real memory or experience of it. He spends his childhood and adulthood at the North Pole, living the life of an elf, despite the fact he grows up to be a man who's three the size of his fellow elves. Maybe that's one reason why he ends up wreaking havoc in the elf community.

So Buddy decides to return to his original home, New York City, to learn about his past and his family. As a man, he's gone



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Saturday Night Live *alumni Will Ferrell (above, in* Elf*) and Mike Myers (right, as Dr. Seuss' Cat in the Hat) inhabit the big screen this fall TOP RIGHT Based on a Disneyland theme park ride,* Haunted Mansion *stars Eddie Murphy—and the mansion itself*

native in the elf world, and now he decides to return to his human roots. But he's in for a surprise. New York isn't quite as idyllic as the North Pole.

Buddy discovers that his father (played by James Caan of *Alien Nation*, TV's *Las Vegas*) could easily pass for Scrooge. He learns that he has a cynical 8-year-old stepbrother who doesn't believe in Santa Claus. Even worse, it looks like no one understands what Christmas is all about.

Once he's discovered his roots, Buddy realizes he can use everything he's learned as an elf to make a difference in his family's life — and maybe even in the lives of others. Bob Newhart (TV's *Bob, Newhart*) and Mary Steenburgen (TV's *Joan of Arcadia, Living with the Dead*) also star.

The Cat in the Hat (Universal Pictures, DreamWorks Pictures, and Imagine Entertainment) opens on November 21. The film is based on the book by Dr. Seuss, which was first published in 1957 and is still in the top 10 best-selling children's books of all time. Mike Myers (the *Austin Powers* series, TV's *Saturday Night Live*) stars as the Cat in the Hat in a live-action film bound to be laden with dazzling special effects. It's the directing debut of Bo Welch, the Oscar-winning production designer of *The Lost Boys, Beetlejuice, Edward Scissorhands, Batman Returns* and the *Men in Black* series. Another Oscar winner, Brian Grazer (*A Beautiful Mind*, TV's *24*), acts as producer.

Dakota Fanning (*I Am Sam*, TV's *Taken*) and Spencer Breslin (*The Kid, The Santa Clause 2*) star as kids left home alone. The Cat in the Hat shows up as an uninvited guest and turns their boring world upside down with the help of his strange accomplices, Thing 1 and Thing 2.

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Myers' Cat instigates ever increasing mischief in Seuss's fantasy world. He may stretch the bounds of obedience and propriety, but the Cat brings something new and exciting to the children's world: a sense of fun and how to have it. Alec Baldwin (*Pearl Harbor*), Kelly Preston (*For Love of the Game*), and Sean Hayes (TV's *Will & Grace*) round out the cast.

Buena Vista's *Haunted Mansion* opens on November 26. Don't laugh. Sure, it's based on the Disneyland theme park ride. But admit it—who would have thought *Pirates of the Caribbean*, also based on a Disney theme park attraction, would become one of this summer's biggest blockbusters? The fact that *Pirates* stars Johnny Depp should have been a tip-off. Like Halle Berry, Depp chooses his projects carefully. *Haunted Mansion* boasts its own impressive cast: Eddie Murphy (*Shrek*), Terence Stamp (*Bowfinger*), Wallace Shawn (*Toy Story*), and Jennifer Tilly (*The Cat's Meow*).

But the biggest star is likely to be the haunted mansion itself, surrounded by fog and mystery. In its antebellum heyday, the mansion hosted the richest residents of New Orleans. These days, it's become home to 1,001 ghosts, including a pair of 19th century newlyweds.

Murphy plays a real estate agent, Jim Evers, who's stranded in the house along with his family. This comedy-adventure is a struggle between Evers and the ghosts for control of the mansion, whose curse can be broken, but only before the clock strikes 13. Evers and his family gain the help of the psychic Madame Leota, along with three hitchhiking ghosts. As they strive to break the curse, they must face plummeting floors, moving pictures, rooms that disappear—not to mention the ghosts. If nothing else, expect spectacular visual and special effects. *Haunted Mansion* has its own share of Oscar winners: make up artist and special effects designer Rick Baker (*An American Werewolf in London*, *Men in Black*) and production designer John Myhre (*Chicago*, *X-Men*). *The Lion King*'s Rob Minkoff directs.

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Even with a solid cast, director, and crew, can lightning strike twice? Consider this: Between the planning stages of preproduction, a shooting schedule that typically lasts at least a few months, and the long months of postproduction when special and visual effects are added, it usually takes at least a year for a movie to be made—and that's not including the years of development that lead up to the commitment to actually make the movie. Considering that *Pirates* was released less than half a year before *Haunted*

SMARTER

Mansion, that means the latter was probably already either filming or in postproduction long before anyone bought the first ticket to see *Pirates*. That alone may be a good indicator. After the dismal failure of another theme-park-based ride, *The Country Bears*, it took a lot of courage to make not just one, but two more movies based on Disney rides.

Another Thanksgiving treat is Paramount Pictures' *Timeline*, based on the best-selling mystery-thriller by Michael Crichton (*Jurassic Park*, *The 13th Warrior*), scheduled for release on November 26. The story begins with a group of students and archaeologists working at a medieval dig site in France. The team leader, Professor Johnston (played by Billy Connolly of *White Oleander*) inexplicably disappears. A clue leads to the team's benefactor, who happens to head a business that's developed surprising technology: the ability to send objects through time.

To rescue their missing professor, the team travels back to 14th century France—where they find themselves in the midst of the Hundred Years' War between France and England.

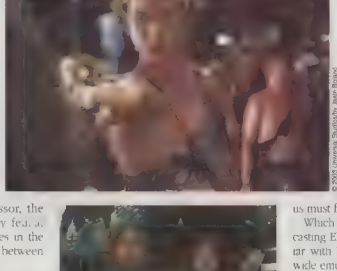
Timeline has the earmarks of a potential blockbuster, maybe even one that can live up to or rival *Jurassic Park*. Crichton's novel juxtaposes a near future where quantum technology is real with authentic details of the Middle Ages. Like his dinosaur blockbuster Crichton's novel is rooted in the human weakness of greed: It's a wealthy high tech businessman who employs historians to excavate a medieval castle with the intent of building a tourist attraction. Once the historians go back in time, they only have 37 hours to find their professor and bring him back—otherwise, they'll all be stranded in the year 1357. One minute the historians live in a world where information moves instantly from one point to another, without the need of hardwiring or networks. The next minute they find themselves in a dangerous world of knights in armor, sword fights, and jousts—not to mention beheadings, imprisonment, and torture.

Timeline is directed and produced by Richard Donner (the *Lethal Weapon* and *Superman* series) and produced by Lauren Shuler Donner (*X-Men*, *X2*). Paul Walker (*The Fast and the Furious*), Frances O'Connor (*A.I. Bedazzled*), and David Thewlis (TV's *Dinotopia*) star.

Look for *Peter Pan* (Universal Pictures, Columbia Pictures, and Revolution Studios) to open on December 25. There have been plenty of versions of Peter Pan. It played on 1950s and 1960s television (anyone remember Mary Martin?). Everyone from Sandy Duncan to Olympic gymnast Cathy Rigby has portrayed Peter Pan on stage in recent years, and yet it debuted on a London stage 100 years ago. And, of course, there's Disney's classic animated film.

This is the first live-action film based on J.M. Barrie's classic story since the days of silent movies. Not only that, the title role is played by a real boy (Jeremy Sumpter of *Frailty*), not by a grown woman.

Set in Edwardian London, the Darling



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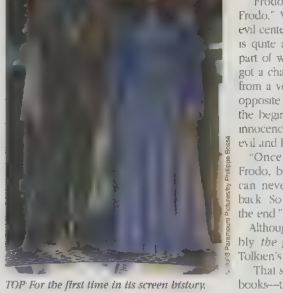

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TOP: For the first time in its screen history, Peter Pan *stars a real boy, Jeremy Sumpter*
BOTTOM: Chris (Paul Walker) and Kate (Frances O'Connor) travel back to the Middle Ages in Michael Crichton's Timeline

children revel in bedtime stories of Peter Pan and Captain Hook (played by Jason Isaacs of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, *The Patriot*). Then one night Peter Pan shows up in the flesh in their bedroom, teaches them how to fly, and leads them over the London rooftops and through the stars to his home in Neverland. Following the most famous boy who ever refused to grow up, the Darling children join the Lost Boys in a carefree life until the inevitable day when they must face Captain Hook.

Written and directed by P.J. Hogan (*My Best Friend's Wedding*), the film also stars Lynn Redgrave (*Gods and Monsters*).

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (New Line Cinema) opens December 17. It's been two years since J.R.R. Tolkien fans expressed their outrage over the casting of Elijah Wood as Frodo, and everyone was on tenterhooks, wondering if the gamble made by New Line Cinema and Peter Jackson and company would be one of the greatest failures in movie history.

In this final chapter of Tolkien's trilogy, Aragorn battles the enemy as he struggles to rise to his rightful place on the throne. At the same time, Frodo battles himself as he tries to finish his quest and fulfill his destiny as the Ringbearer. One of the greatest themes in Tolkien's masterpiece is the concept that good and evil aren't always outside forces in the world, but are forces that each of us must face within ourselves.

Which brings us full circle to the choice of casting Elijah Wood as Frodo. Anyone familiar with Wood's work is well aware of his wide emotional range.

Frodo in the third movie ceases to be Frodo," Wood says. "He reaches a kind of evil center that you don't think is possible. It is quite a wide range of emotions. I think part of what attracted me to Frodo is that I got a chance as an actor to take a character from a very innocent place to the complete opposite. He's sort of innocent and naïve at the beginning, and at the end he's lost his innocence. He has these moments of pure evil and hatred.

"Once the ring is destroyed, he's still Frodo, but his innocence is gone, and he can never get that kind of purity of soul back. So there's a real sadness to Frodo at the end."

Although one of the greatest—and possibly *the* greatest—fantasies ever created, Tolkien's work is also grounded in reality.

That's also what strikes me about the books—they don't end on a positive note. Wood says. "Ultimately, Middle Earth is saved and peace is restored, but these characters will never be able to go back to the way that they once were. Some are better for that. It could be argued that Frodo may be better for that. It's still sad when you appreciate them so much for what they are and what they stand for, and then see them stripped of the things that define them and then suddenly they can't regain that feeling anymore. It's a sad end to an amazing story. And even though there are uplifting things, it's sort of bittersweet. I love it.

Stay tuned for more news of *The Return of the King* in the next issue.

EASIER

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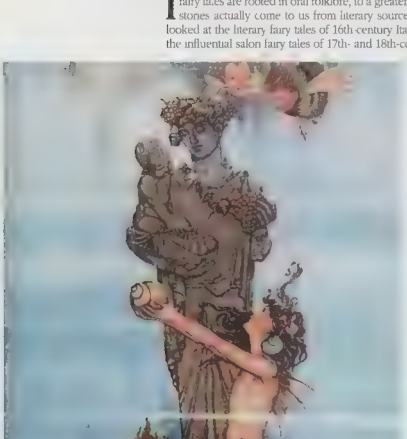
By Terri Windling

Hans Christian Andersen: Father of the Modern Fairy Tale

It's commonly supposed that all fairy tales are stories from the folk tradition, passed through the generations by storytellers since the dawn of time. While it's true that most fairy tales are rooted in oral folklore, to a greater or lesser degree, many of the best-known stories actually come to us from literary sources. In previous Folkroots columns, we've looked at the literary fairy tales of 16th-century Italy (written by Straparola and Basile) and the influential salon fairy tales of 17th- and 18th-century France (written by D'Aulnoy, Perrault, L'Héritier, etc.). In this column, we turn to 19th century Denmark where the writer Hans Christian Andersen penned some of the best loved fairy tales of all time: *The Little Mermaid, The Wild Swans, The Princess and the Pea, The Emperor's New Clothes, The Nightingale, The Tinder Box, The Ugly Duckling, The Steadfast Tin Soldier, The Red Shoes, The Fir Tree, The Snow Queen* (his masterpiece), and many others (I'm assuming that most readers are familiar with the stories and thus won't recap them in this column, but if you haven't read Andersen, I recommend the translation of his fairy tales by Reginald Spink.)



Statue illustrations by W. Heath Robinson

Andersen's The Little Mermaid *is one of the best-loved fairy tales of all time. TOP: Tommelise rides on a bird's back in another Andersen tale*

Hans Christian Andersen's own life had some of the aspects of a fairy tale. He was born the son of a poor cobbler and he died a rich and famous man, celebrated around the world, the intimate of kings and queens. Although today Andersen is primarily known as a writer of stories for children, during his lifetime he was also celebrated for his other literary works, including six novels, five travel journals, three autobiographies, and numerous poems and plays. The modern image of Andersen (as portrayed in the sugary 1952 film *Hans Christian Andersen*, starring Danny Kaye) is of a simple, innocent, child-like spinner of tales, a character from one of his own stories. Letters and diaries by Andersen and his contemporaries, however, draw the picture of a very different man: a sharply intelligent, ambitious writer with a hardscrabble past, a love of high society, and a tortured soul. Likewise, Andersen's fairy tales when read in the original Danish (or in good, unabridged translations) are far more sophisticated and multilayered than the simple children's fables they became in all too many translated editions, retellings, and media adaptations. The writer was no innocent nail recounting fancies whispered by the fairies; he was a serious artist, a skillful literary craftsman, and a shrewd observer of human nature and of the social scene of 19th century Denmark.

Reading Andersen's prose after growing up with abridged and altered versions of his stories can be a surprising experience—much like reading J.M. Barrie's sly, subversive *Peter Pan* in the original. Both Andersen and Barrie wrote stories for children into which they carefully, skillfully embedded comedy, social critique, satire, and philosophy aimed at adult readers. Andersen pioneered this style and writers like Barrie are indebted to him, as are numerous children's writers today whose works are beloved by adult readers, including Jane Yolen, Roald Dahl, Diana Wynne Jones, Philip Pullman, and J.K. Rowling.

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"I seize on an idea for grown-ups," Andersen explained, "and then tell the story to the little ones while always remembering that Father and Mother often listen, and you must also give them something for their minds." His fairy tales can be read simply as magical adventures, but they contain much more for the discerning reader, bristling with characters drawn from Andersen's own life and from the many worlds he traveled through in his remarkable life's journey.

Like the Ugly Duckling, born in a duck-yard and secretly destined to be a swan, Andersen was the son of a shoemaker and a washerwoman in the city of Odense, where the family shared a single room and lived a hand-to-mouth existence. There was always food, but never quite enough, there were books on the shelf, but no money for grammar school. Andersen was sent to the Poor School instead and expected to learn a trade. Tall and gawky, ill at ease with other children, the boy spent his time reading, dreaming, sewing costumes out of scraps for his puppet theater, and haunting the doorway of the city's theater when traveling players came to town.

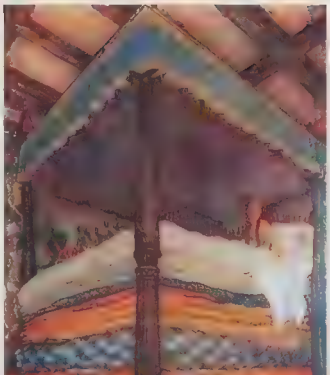

Illustration by Edward Ardizzone

The Princess and the Pea *was one of the first fairy tales Andersen wrote, at age 29; it was published in 1835*

Odense, at that time, was a provincial city still rooted in its rural past, with a living tradition of Danish folklore and colorful folk pageantry. In *The True Story of My Life*, Andersen relates how he learned Danish folk tales in his youth from old women in the spinning room of the insane asylum where his grandmother worked. "They considered me a marvelous clever child," he recalls, "too clever to live long, and they rewarded my eloquence by telling me fairy tales, and a world as rich as that of *The Thousand and One Nights* arose before me." The Arabian tales of *The Thousand and One Nights* also fired the boy's imagination, for this was one of the few precious books owned by Andersen's father.

Andersen began writing at an early age (an unusual preoccupation for a boy of his class), but his true ambition was to go on the stage as an actor, dancer, or singer. He memorized scenes from plays and poems and loved to declaim them to anyone who'd listen; he also possessed a fine singing voice (he was known as the Nightingale of Odense) and this talent in particular began to open doors for him. The boy received invitations to sing at dinner parties in rich men's houses, where his precociousness combined with his shabby appearance provoked as much amusement as admiration. This was Andersen's first taste of "superior" society (as it was called in those days of rigid class demarcation), a taste that he never lost as he subsequently climbed into Denmark's highest circles.

When Andersen was 11, his father died, leaving the family more destitute than ever, and the boy was sent off to do factory work, at which he lasted only a few days. In 1819, at the age of 14, he left home and Odense altogether, traveling alone to Copenhagen to make his fame and fortune. Determined to join the Royal Theater, he presented himself to the theater's director, who bluntly advised the uneducated youth to go home and learn a trade. Undaunted, the boy sought out a well-known critic and the city's prima ballerina, both of whom turned the scruffy urchin out and told him to go home. Growing desperate, and running out of money, Andersen pestered every luminary he could think of until he turned up on the doorstep of Guiseppe Siboni, director of the Royal Choir School. Weyse, an accomplished composer, happened to be dining with Siboni that day. He had risen from poverty himself and he took pity on the boy. Weyse promptly raised a sum of money that enabled Andersen to rent a cheap room and to study with Siboni and others connected to the Royal Theater.

Thus began a new period in Andersen's life. By day he studied and loitered in the theater, rubbing shoulders with some of the most famous men and women of Denmark's Golden Age; by night he lived in a mean little room in one of the city's most squalid neighborhoods, often going without meals and spending what little money he had on books. As in Odense, the boy was called upon to sing and recite at distinguished dinner parties—and once again the smiles of his hosts were often at his own expense. The aid he received for the next three years was sporadic and precarious, never quite enough to keep hunger from the door, bestowed with a mixture of generosity and condescension that left lasting marks on Andersen's psyche. (He would draw upon this experience years later when creating tales such as *The Little Mermaid*, in which the heroine submits to loss and pain in order to cross into another world—only to find she'll never be fully accepted, loved, or understood.) Yet despite the hardships he endured, and the humiliations he suffered through, the young Andersen was thrilled to be on his way to a theatrical career . . . or so he thought. He practiced scenes from famous plays, he tried his hand at writing a tragedy, and he began to study dance at the Royal Theater's Ballet School. But by the age of 17, his voice had changed, his gawky physique had proven unsuited to ballet. He was dismissed from school, informed that he had no future on the stage.

A youth other than Hans Christian Andersen might have crumbled under this blow, but throughout his life he possessed a remarkable (even exasperating) degree of confidence and never lost faith in his worth, no matter how often he faced rejection. Determined to find success in Denmark's theater but barred from a performance career, Andersen focused on his remaining talent: He'd become a writer of plays. He'd already submitted one play to the Royal Theater which had promptly been turned down. Now the boy dashed off another play, this time a historical tragedy. It too was turned away. Yet the play had shown a glimmer of promise, and this brought him to the attention of Jonas Collin—a powerful court official and the financial director of the Royal Theater. Collin perceived what everyone else had perceived: that the boy was badly handicapped by his lack of formal education. Collin, however, resolved to do something to solve the problem of Andersen's arranging an educational fund to be paid by the King of Denmark.

Andersen was sent away to grammar school in the town of Slagelse, 57 miles from Copenhagen in the west of Zealand. He was six years older than his fellow students, far behind them in general education, and temperamentally unsuited for long, dull days sitting in a classroom. Nonetheless, he persevered, determined to prove himself worthy of

Collin's interest, the King's patronage, and the faith of his small circle of supporters back in Copenhagen But life as a grammar student would prove to be especially difficult, even for a youth whose life had hardly been easy to this point Andersen's headmaster was a pedagogue who could have stepped from the pages of a Dickens novel, fond of using ridicule, humiliation, and contempt to bully his students into learning He was particularly vicious to dreamy young Andersen, determined to crush the boy's pride, conceit, and especially his high ambitions—and to teach him that his place in the world (due to his origins) must be a humble one In particular, Andersen was strictly forbidden to "indulge" in any creative work such as creative writing—a deprivation that the boy, who'd been writing since he was small, found particularly hard.

For four years, Andersen endured this tyranny, suffered, worried that he was going mad, and wrote despairing letters home—which Jonas Collin calmly dismissed as adolescent self-pity. In 1826, at the age of 21, Andersen's emotions came to the boil, he defied his headmaster by writing a poem titled "The Dying Child." Based on a common 19th century theme (in the days of high infant mortality rates), this poem was unusual in that it was told from the child's point of view, and evoked a haunting sadness fueled by the author's own misery Andersen's headmaster pronounced the poem rubbish (it became one of the most famous poems of the century) and heaped such abuse on Andersen that a young teacher became alarmed. The teacher spoke to Jonas Collin directly, and Collin swiftly pulled Andersen out of school. Andersen remained haunted by nightmares of his headmaster for the rest of his life

Andersen was now allowed to return to Copenhagen, where he lived in a small, clean attic room, studied with private tutors, and took his meals with the Collins and other prominent families, in rotation His particular attachment to the Collin family solidified during this period and would become a steady source of both joy and pain in the years that followed. Jonas he loved as a second father, the five Collins children were as dear to him as brothers and sisters, and the Collins, in turn, grew used to this odd young man sitting at their hearth Much has been written by Andersen scholars about the complicated relationship he forged with the family, who were pillars of Danish society and moved in the highest court circles. Jonas Collin's support of Andersen was both generous and unwavering, and Collin's household provided the young man with the family and stability he craved But although they opened their home to him, included him in family gatherings, and assisted him in countless ways, Andersen was never allowed to forget that he was not entirely one of them, for he was not a member of their class Even in the days of his worldwide fame, when he was home with the Collins family, he was still the cobbler's son from Odense . the Royal Theater's charity boy ... the Little Match Girl with her nose pressed to the glass of a rich family's window.

Most complicated of all was Andersen's relationship with Jonas's son Edvard, who was not only Andersen's closest friend but also (Andersen scholars now believe) the great love of Andersen's life Edvard's response to Andersen, by contrast, was stolid and unsentimental. He expressed his loyalty to Andersen with tireless acts of practical assistance, yet always held a small part of himself back from his friend. This was symbolized by Edvard's refusal to use the familiar pronoun "Du," insisting on the formal "De" instead. "If you will forget the circumstances of my birth," Andersen wrote to Edvard poignantly, "and always be to me what I am to you, you will find in me the most honest and sympathetic friend." It did no good Edvard stuck to the formal "De" for the rest of their lives

A year after his return to Copenhagen, Andersen sat down in his little attic room and wrote his first book, *A Walking Tour from the Holmen Canal to the Eastern Point of Anger* Although the title sounds (purposefully) like a travel book, this clever and fantastical work, written when he was just 22, follows a young poet through the streets of Copenhagen over the course of a single night. Unable to interest a publisher, Andersen scraped together the means to publish it himself—and the book was a hit, quickly selling out its entire print run. He then wrote a play which, to his delight, was accepted at the Royal Theater Titled *Love on St Nicholas Tower*, it proved to be a popular success Now Andersen left his studies for good (after passing two university exams), and he concentrated on writing and publishing his first collection of poems Despite this bright beginning, the early years of his career were rocky ones—full of lows as well as highs and marred by unsympathetic reviews in the Danish press It was not until his books and poems began to excite attention abroad, particularly in Germany, that critics started to take him seriously in his native land This mixture of praise (from abroad) and censure (at home) was hurtful and confusing to Andersen, as were the intermingled messages of acceptance and rejection he received from his upper-class friends He grew a protective armor of wit, but kept a tally of each hurt, each blow, and in later years, no praise was ever enough to balance the scorecard He grew into a man with two distinct and conflicting sides to his nature In his talents he was supremely confident, speaking candidly of his high ambitions and rhapsodizing over each success, which made him something of an oddity to his friends (and a figure of ridicule to his enemies) in a social milieu where displaying signs of personal ambition was frowned upon. Yet Andersen could also be sensitive, emotional, and hungry for approval to a debilitating degree. This made him, at times, an exasperating companion, but many found his friendship worth the trouble, for he was also capable of great warmth, humor, kindness, and moments of surprising wisdom

We see this side of Andersen most clearly in his fairy tales, which he began to write at the age of 29 with great excitement A volume containing his first four tales (*The Tinder Box, The Princess and the Pea, Little Claus and Big Claus,* and *Little Ida's Flowers*) was published in May 1835, followed up by a volume of three more tales the following December Andersen's earliest stories are more clearly inspired by Danish folk tales than his later works—yet none are direct, unadorned retellings of Danish folk stones. Rather, these are original fictions that use Danish folklore as their starting point and then head off in bold new directions, borrowing further inspiration from *The Thousand and One Nights*, the *salon* tales of 17th-century France, the German tales collected by the Brothers Grimm, and the fantasies of E.T.A. Hoffman, among other works. It's impossible today to fully understand the sensation these little stones caused, for nothing quite like them had ever been seen in Danish literature The tales were revolutionary for several reasons: Across Europe, the field of children's fiction was still in its very early days, and was still dominated by dull, pious stories intended to teach and inculcate moral values Andersen's magical tales were rich as chocolate cake after a diet of wholesome gruel, and the narrative voice spoke familiarly, warmly, conspiratorially to children rather than preaching to them from on high Despite the Christian imagery recurrent in the tales (typical of 19th-century fiction), these are remarkably earthy, anarchic, occasionally even amoral stories—comical, cynical, fatalistic by turns, rather than morally instructive. And unlike the folk tales collected by the Grimms, set in distant lands once upon a time, Andersen set his tales in Copenhagen and other familiar, contemporary settings, mixed fantastical descriptions with common ones, and invested everyday household objects (toys,

Further Reading

Hans Christian Andersen Fairy Tales, translated by Reginald Spink, illustrated by W Heath Robinson

Hans Christian Andersen. The Life of a Storyteller by Jackie Wullschlager

Hans Christian Andersen The Story of His Life and Work 1805 75 by Elias Bredsdorff *The Diaries of Hans Christian Andersen*, translated and edited by Patricia L Conroy and Sven L Rossel

The Amazing Paper Cuttings of Hans Christian Andersen by Beth Wagner Brust

Thomas Gray in Copenhagen. In Which the Philosopher Cat Meets the Ghost of Hans Christian Andersen by Philip J. Davis

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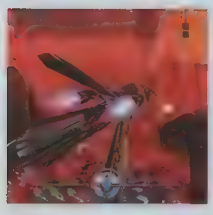

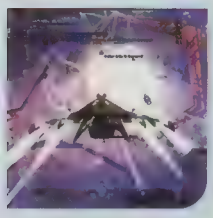

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dishes, etc) with personalities and magic

Andersen carefully crafted the narration of his tales to evoke the power of oral story telling, yet the narrative voice is a distinctive one, not the impersonal voice of most folk tales. He perfected his stories by reading them aloud within his social circle, and many a dinner party ended with children and adults alike clamoring for a story. As Andersen's fairy tales became known and loved, he found himself much in demand as a dinner guest, and he also began to receive requests to read his work in public Although he hadn't been destined for an acting career, his youthful theatrical training served him well George Griffen, an American diplomat, wrote of Andersen's performance: "He is a remarkably fine reader, and has often been compared in this respect to Dickens—Dickens was in truth a superb reader, but I am inclined to think that Andersen's manner is far more impressive and eloquent Both of these men have always read to crowded houses. Dickens voice was perhaps better suited for the stage than the reading desk. It was stronger and louder than Andersen s, but nothing like as mellow and musical I heard Dickens read the death bed scene of Little Nell in New York, and I was moved to tears, but I knew that the author himself was reading the story, but when I heard Andersen read the story of the Little Girl with the Matches, I did not think of the author at all, but wept like a child, unconscious of everything around me "

George Griffen was not the only adult reduced to tears by Andersen's tales—which were startling, fresh, and urgent in ways that we can only imagine, now that Andersen's stories have acquired the patina of age and familiarity. Nineteenth-century readers were particularly moved by how the tales gave voice to the powerless—the young, the poor, the very old—and imbued them with special strength, wisdom, and connection to the natural world (in opposition to the artifice of reason or the follies of society) Gerda, for instance, goes up against her rival (the rich dazzling, coldly intellectual Snow Queen) armed only with her youth and compassion in *The Emperor's New Clothes*, a child displays more wisdom than the King We find this theme in traditional folk tales (the good-hearted peasant girl or boy whose kindness wins him or her riches or a crown), but Andersen gave such figures new life by placing them in contemporary settings, layering elements of sharp social critique into their stories. His biographer, Jackie Wullschanger, notes that Andersen "was a product of his times—of Romanticism, of the revival of the imaginative spirit and of the growth of democratic ideas—in addressing himself to the child in the adult through a shift in perspective, by allowing the child, or toy, or later farmyard animal, to speak with his or her own voice and feelings. . The crucial contributions of Andersen and Dickens in the 1830s and 1840s was to focus on children, another traditionally mute and oppressed group The urge to speak out, to claim equality of talent and emotional need .., was a driving force for the new 19th century writers who did not come from genteel urban classes, and none came from so deprived and uneducated a background as Andersen."

In 1838, when Andersen was 33, the specter of poverty was banished forever when the King of Denmark awarded the writer an annual stipend for life Now he no longer depended on friends, or on the fickle whims of the reading public, now he was free to write as he liked—and for a time he put aside the writing of novels, which had been his bread and butter, and concentrated on fairy tales and works for his beloved theater Andersen wrote 210 fairy tales in all, published over the course of his life The tales were translated across Europe, then traveled around the world, making him the best known Scandinavian writer of his age (as well as of ours). The doors to noble houses opened to him, and he wandered from country manor to country manor, returning periodically to Copenhagen, to the Collins and to the Royal Theater. He also traveled abroad extensively, unusually so for a Dane of his day, and he published several popular books about his travels He was particularly fond of

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southern Italy and of Weimar (now part of Germany), and he enjoyed a close, important friendship with the literature-loving Prince of Weimar. In Cassel (also part of Germany), he introduced himself to folklorist Jacob Grimm, then ran away mortified because Grimm had never heard of his stories. Wilhelm Grimm, who *had* read Andersen's tales, later sought him out in Copenhagen and Andersen grew quite friendly with the Brothers Grimm and their Cassel circle of folklore enthusiasts.

Andersen made his first journey to England in 1847. His tales had appeared in four different volumes there in 1846, and despite uniformly poor translations they were greatly loved by Victorian readers. Charles Dickens was an admirer and he made a point of meeting Andersen, gifting the Danish writer with signed copies of his collected works. The two maintained a warm correspondence until, on Andersen's next journey, Dickens invited him to his country home in Kent. The visit was a disaster. The timing was atrocious, for Dickens' marriage was on the verge of collapse, and Andersen—never noticing the tension in the household—proved to be a needy guest. Dickens placed a sign on the guest room wall after Andersen's departure. "Hans Christian Andersen slept in this room for five weeks which seemed to the family AGES." Andersen himself could not understand why he never heard from Dickens again.

Part of the problem was that Andersen spoke virtually no English ("In English, he is the Deaf and Dumb Asylum," Dickens sneered to a friend), which led London society to view the writer as something of a simpleton. Also, his tales had been rendered into English language by translators with limited literary skills, working from German texts, not the original Danish. Thus the versions of the tales that were best known to English readers (a problem that persists in some modern editions) were simpler, sweeter, less comic and ironic than the ones Andersen actually wrote. This lack of sophistication in the English text caused Andersen to be labeled as a writer for children only, contrary to his broader reputation in the rest of Europe. His quiet, confused demeanor as he traveled through England (due to his inability to communicate) made the clever and witty Andersen appear as naive and childlike as his tales—and a myth was born, later put onto film by the actor Danny Kaye. Andersen himself railed against the notion of being viewed as a man who'd spent his life with children when he objected to the designs for a statue surrounding him with a circle of tykes. "I said loud and clear that I was dissatisfied … that my tales were just as much for older people as for children, who only understood the outer trappings and did not comprehend and take in the whole work until they were mature—that naiveté was only part of my tales, that humor was what really gave them their flavor."

Although Andersen's humor is indeed a salient characteristic of the tales (when they're well translated), what many readers remember most about his work is its overwhelming sadness. The Little Match Girl dies, the Little Mermaid is betrayed by her prince, the Fir Tree lies discarded after Christmas sighing over past glories. Even tales that end happily—*The Snow Queen*, *The Ugly Duckling*, *Thumbelina*, *The Wild Swans*—are heart wrenching in their depiction of anguish endured along the way. As a child, I found reading Andersen's tales a particularly wrenching experience—and yet I read them over and over, both attracted to and disturbed by their unflinching depiction of pain. In a wonderful essay titled "In a Trance of Self" (published in *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall*, edited by Kate Bernheimer), Deborah Eisenberg discusses the experience of reading Andersen's *The Snow Queen*: "The febrile clarity and propulsion [of the story] is accomplished at the expense of the reader's nerves. Especially taxing are the claims on the reader by both Kay and Gerda. Who has not, like Gerda, been exiled from the familiar comforts of one's world by the departure or defection of a beloved? And what child has not been confounded by the daily employment of impossible obstacles and challenges? Who has not been forced to accede to a longing that nothing but its object can allay? On the other hand, who has not experienced some mea-

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Illustration by W. Heath Robinson

"The bud opened into full-blown flower, in the middle of which lay a beautiful child" (from The Marsh King's Daughter*)*

sure or some element of Kay's despair? Who has not, at one time or another, been paralyzed and estranged as his appetite and affection for life leaches away? Who has not courted an annihilating involvement? Who has not mistaken intensity for significance? What devotee of art has not been denied art's blessing? And who, withholding sympathy from his unworthy self, has not been ennobled by the sympathy of a loving friend?

Passion repressed is another theme one finds below the surface of Andersen's fairy tales. We see this theme most clearly in *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, written in 1838. "The story is unusual among Andersen's early tales," writes Joan G. Haahr in *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, "both in its emphasis on sensual desire and in its ambiguities. Blind fate, not intention, determines all events. Moreover, the narrative questions the very decorum it praises. The tin soldier's passive acceptance of whatever happens to him, while exemplifying pietistic ideals of self-denial, also contributes to his doom. Were he to speak and act, the soldier might gain both life and love. Restrained, however, by inhibition and convention, he finds only tragedy and death. The tale is often read autobiographically, with the soldier viewed as symbolizing Andersen's feelings of inadequacy with women, his passive acceptance of bourgeois class attitudes, or his sense of alienation as an artist and an outsider, from full participation in everyday life."

Andersen himself was a physically awkward and homely man ("I shall have no success with my appearance," he once wrote, appraising himself with blunt honesty, "so I make use of whatever is available"), and he was prone to harboring passions for people he could never have. Publicly, Andersen courted two women during his lifetime, the sister of a student friend, who soon became engaged to another, and the Swedish singer Jenny Lind, who could offer him only friendship. (He wrote his lovely tale *The Nightin-*

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Igniculus (furious fire), an evil voracious beast, alighted upon the ruins of an old castle crowning a verdant mound. The dragon soon put all around it to flame, spreading a black pool of desolation about the once fertile land.

In a desperate bid to appease the monster the good fathers of the nearest city offered up their daughters for sacrifice. Having been made in the classic vein, Igniculus accepted this traditional bargain in exchange for its abstinence and hungrily awaited the first maiden. The years passed, and the once proud city prosperous and busy, grew dark and despairing under the weight of its shame. Whereas before the dragon the people had known contentment and plenty now they only knew fear.

No one dared to defy the offering or challenge the dragon and soon the people who dwelled beneath the blackened mound became known as the city of the damned. The shameful pact was eventually broken by a knight errant called Othrim who foolishly fell in love with one of the city's doomed maidens. When she, Elana, was selected as that season's victim her bold lover made to her a vow that she would not take the same path as her sisters in death. Othrim secretly followed the solemn procession and when Elana had been chained to the sacrificial oak, and her escort had swiftly departed, the knight stole in to the evil place and broke his lover's bonds. They might have made good their escape without hindrance had not their antics been observed by the keen eyes of the dragon.

Igniculus rudely interrupted Elana's deliverance and offered terrible battle to the brave Othrim.

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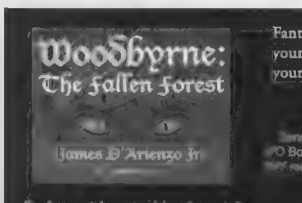

gale for Jenny Lind.) Privately, he was more deeply obsessed with men first with Edvard Collin, then with a young theology student and finally, in his later years, with a handsome young ballet dancer—the latter of whom returned his interest, at least to some degree. This was an aspect of his life that was long ignored by Andersen scholars until Wullschlager explored its impact on the writer's work in *Hans Christian Andersen: The Life of a Storyteller*. In an interview, biographer Wullschlager noted that if Andersen had been alive today, his life—and thus his art—might have been very different. "Without the enormous repression of his time, he could have declared himself to be a homosexual. Many people have asked me what would have become of him today. He might have taken anti-depressants and been happier, but then he would not have written his fairy tales."

And that would have been a great pity, for Andersen achieved something remarkable. He created tales that are read and loved and told anew by each new generation—tales that inspire writers, artists, and dramatists two centuries later. The most prestigious award in children's books is called the Hans Christian Andersen Medal, and writers of fantasy literature for adults have found inspiration in Andersen's fairy tales as well. Among the many fine works based on Andersen's tales, I particularly recommend the following novels: *The Snow Queen* by Joan Vinge, *The Nightingale* by Kara Dalkey, *The Wild Swans* by Peg Kerr, *The Snow Queen* by Eileen Kernaghan, and *The Girl Who Trod on a Loaf* by Kathryn Davis. Recommended short stories: "The Snow Queen" by Patricia A. McKillip (*Snow White, Blood Red*), "You, Little Match Girl" by Joyce Carol Oates (*Black Heart, Ivory Bones*), "Sparks" by Gregory Frost and "Steadfast" by Nancy Kress (*Black Swan, White Raven*), "The Sea Hag" by Melissa Lee Shaw (*Silver Birch, Blood Moon*), "The Real Princess" by Susan Palwick and "Match Girl" by Anne Bishop (*Ruby Slippers, Golden Tears*). "The Pangs of Love" by Jane Gardam and "The Chrysanthemum Robe" by Kara Dalkey (*The Armless Maiden*), "The Steadfast Tin Soldier" by Joan Vinge (*Women of Wonder*). "In the Witch's Garden" by Naomi Kritzer (*Realms of Fantasy*, October 2002). "Swans" by Kelly Link and "Becoming Charise" by Kathe Koja (*A Wolf at the Door*). Recommended poetry: the Snow Queen cycle of poems in *Blood Pressure* by Sandra M. Gilbert.

In 1867, when he was 62 years old, Hans Christian Andersen returned to Odense. A choir sang and the entire city was illuminated in his honor. "A star of fortune hangs above me," Andersen once wrote. "Thousands have deserved it more than I; often I cannot understand why this good should have been vouchsafed to me among so many thousands. But if the star should set, even while I am penning these lines, be it so; still I can say it has shone, and I have received a rich portion." Andersen died in 1875, and his stories live on.

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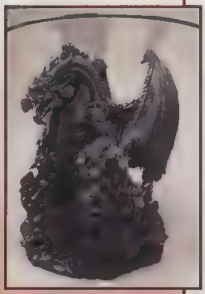

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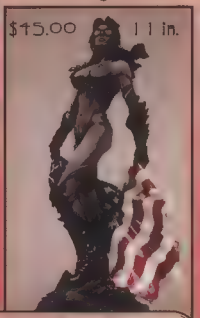

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By Gahan Wilson

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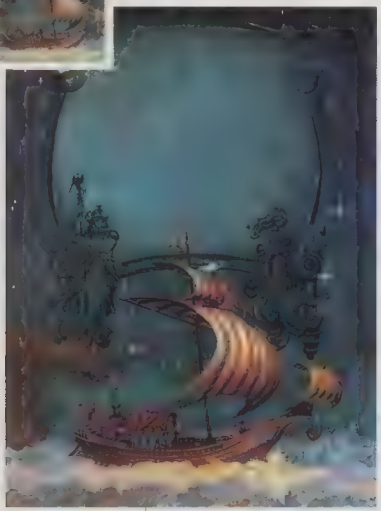

Thomas Kidd created the cover art for Kage Baker's first fantasy novel, The Anvil of the World, *from Tor*

This is, unhappily, a period when mainstream publishing is going through a period so bleak and dismally conservative that one really does think twice before going to a social event likely to host a large number of authors because one knows all of their conversation will consist of intensely repetitive and profoundly depressing accounts of recent setbacks and humiliations suffered by them while plying their trade.

And the poor things are not exaggerating. It is sadly true that publishers do treat their mid list writers with something approaching contempt and cringe away almost entirely from unknowns whilst they mortgage their farms to fix distribution, shelf placement, and publicity in desperate attempts to guarantee the success of a handful of books they have selected, or have had crafted to be huge-selling blockbusters. This attitude, I suspect, comes from the fact that the majority of major publishers have been purchased by companies that produce movies and television shows.

But there is one area of the business that has noticeably managed to avoid an astounding amount of all this and that still continues to bring out fresh and sparkling stuff: childrens' books!

I am not really sure why this is so. It may indeed be that the editors working in that area are a particularly dedicated and heroic lot and have fought off the demands of their employers to concentrate all efforts on "guaranteed" best sellers. But I suspect it's based—as is pretty much everything else nowadays—on sales figures and this leads me to suspect in turn that it may be that the children, who determine the success of these books after all, are perhaps less malleable and more discriminating than their parents and us they who are insisting on books coming from all sorts of fresh new directions. Call me a hopeless idealist.

Philip Reeve's ***Mortal Engines*** (EOS/HarperCollins Books, New York, trade paperback, 320 pp., $16.99), a swashbuckling story that's hilarious and heartbreaking by turns, is firmly based on tried and true traditions lovingly developed through multitudes of generations of authors telling children stories of derring-do and high adventure, and the astute reader will again and again be pleasantly reminded of this or that classic in the field. As with many of those same classics, the story Reeve tells is profoundly relevant to his own adult era and it is not in the least afraid to intelligently attack and accurately mock the foibles of his time.

The really marvelous basic notion of the plot is that most of humanity, for the same hodge-podgy bunch of reasons that determine most of our importantly pivotal historic decisions, has opted to live in huge wheeled cities that constantly prowl the landscape, either fleeing from or hunting down other cities. The period is officially called the Traction Era, and while the majority heartily approve of it, there is an irritating and now and then genuinely dangerous minority (most of it living in what are called "static settlements") that emphatically does not.

The story gets off to a rousing start with the city of London in hot pursuit of a small mining town "across the dried out bed of the old North Sea" to eat it and as the plot unabashedly roars on—this is one of those books that is almost impossible to put down—we are rapidly and skillfully introduced to

Alone.

In the frigid wastelands

of the Spine of the World,

surrounded

by a ravaging horde

of deadly enemies

with nothing to lose

and nowhere to run,

Drizzt Do'Urden

isn't going down

without a fight.

A very vicious fight.

The Hunter returns

October 28, 2003

FORGOTTEN REALMS wizards.com/books

a varied and unfailingly colorful cast of characters packed with intrepid if inexperienced young heroes and heroines, all sorts of grotesque characters both lovable and loathsome, and a good many I think will particularly interest and linger with readers both young and older because they are located in puzzling moral regions somewhere in between.

One of the most disturbing of these latter figures is the fright ening Grike, the last of the Lazarus Brigade. He/it is a Stalker, a soldier killed in battle whose body, after having been greatly altered by surgery and lavishly implanted with devices designed to inhumanly bolster his durability, increase his sensory apparatus, and in every way make him a deadlier, almost unstoppable cyborg warrior, was then raised from the dead by the authorities to track down and destroy any person or persons who may have displeased them. I am as sure as I am sure I am sitting here now writing this review for you that such as Grike are in the research and development stages as of this moment and that long before the youngest readers now enjoying *Mortal Engines* have grown old and died, he/it will have become a routine reality.

Call me a pessimist.

Encouragingly, the attempt to totally dehu manize Grike fails and he falls hopelessly in love—of course, for all the wrong reasons—with the hideously scarred Hester who is one of the most touching heroines I've encountered in quite some time. In the end I think the two of them quietly dominate the book and will linger longest with their young readers, increasingly so into middle age and beyond, very much as Gollum from the *Lord of the Rings* dominates all the rest of the work and will not go away.

Not that there isn't sensationally terrific competition betwixt those other character ranging from the brave Tom Natsworthy, a young apprentice in the guild of Historians who is the novel's principal male hero, the equally brave but far more beautiful Katherine Valentine and her pet wolf "Dog" Thaddeus Valentine, London's head historian who is the father of Hester and an idol of the public who is nearly as complex in his fashion as Grike is in his, and an absolutely marvelous cast of really gloriously bizarre sorts such as the darkly mysterious and endlessly inventive aviatrix Miss Fang and the unrepentantly villainous Chrysler Peavey, totally merciless commander of the pirate suburb Turnbridge Wheels!

Climb aboard, Matey, or rot in the desolation of the Rustwater Marshes!

Philip Pullman is a towering figure in today's children's literature and I think it is quite safe to say he will be one of those authors whose best books will continue to be loyally read way into the future, and that there's an excellent chance your great grandchildren, should you ever have any, will not be unfamiliar with his name.

Let me admit at the start that the reader should by no means labor under the anticipation that ***Spring-Heeled Jack*** (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, hardcover, 112 pp., $9.95) is a major work in Pullman's canon, that he or she should most certainly not expect something along the lines of his awesome trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, and that it's even possible Pullman and his co-conspirator, the artist David Mostyn, had a drink or two now and then whilst putting together this delightful send up of a Victorian melodrama.

But that doesn't mean to say the whole thing is in any way short of being a work of art because I assure you—backed with all the dignity and authority of being a book critic in a hugely distinguished magazine—that it is.

Just in case you don't know, let me inform you that the amazingly heroic spring-Heeled Jack was an urban legend of London of the 1800s (and, for all I know, the late 1700s) who presaged many of our present superheroes by wearing a cape, hunting down nasty people and putting them out of business and being able to make amazing leaps over rooftops, although the explanation for this latter knack (he had coiled springs in his shoe heels) might have made Superman or Wonder Woman snicker. Oh, yes—and he had eyes that glowed in the dark and he looked like the devil!

I won't give away too much of the plot lest you slide back from the edge of your chair, but know that the heroic Jack takes on a great number of very unpleasant people, such as the famous villain Mack the Knife, Superintendent Kilroy of the Alderman Cawn Plaster Memorial Orphanage, and many other unpleasant people, including Filthy, a gangster plagued by his conscience,"an odd, bedraggled little creature like a mournful moth," not to mention some perfectly good folk like the London Constabulary to see to it that a little group of orphans manages to become reunited with their father.

I probably shouldn't have mentioned the father.

Anyhow, something is probably wrong with you if *Spring Heeled Jack* doesn't make you laugh and it is also packed with subtly educational asides such as an involved drawing showing one how to Hollystone a Puttock Shroud.

And I suppose it's cheating but everything works out fine for the people who deserve it in the end so you'll enjoy it even if you're not a child.

A few years back there was a huge revolution among the writers and artists who worked for comic book companies. They became inspired by the Europeans to explore the boundaries of their art and to work past the conventions and limitations of the superhero sagas they'd developed so interestingly and to take off into other realms. They began writing and illustrating what came to be called graphic novels, toyed with autobiographical visions, tried out odd ways of illustrating poems and political and philosophical musings, and in various other ways took their art into regions heretofore unexplored.

These efforts met with encouraging success as customers of comic book stores began to buy more and more of this new experimental material and the artists and writers began to drift away from the traditional comic book publishers and publish on their own. When that started to succeed noticeably they began talking with real book stores, amazingly received some real interest, and for a magic moment it looked as if the whole field would take wing and fly to high places it had never dreamed of visiting before.

Unfortunately—and not very surprisingly—it turned out that the artists and writers weren't very good businessmen nor very realistic in their ambitions. Bad deals were struck, important obligations were not met, and before it had barely begun this whole new expansion withered and then almost completely died away.

Fortunately, there were some among them who were more astute so far as business was concerned and none more so than Art Spiegelman who is mostly celebrated among the general public for his brilliant Mauz and highly admired among his peers for creating *RAW* magazine, a publication venerated not only for keeping alive the underground comic movement, but for spotting and showcasing newer talents as they come along.

When the above-mentioned appearance of comic books in real-life bookstores died, Spiegleman and Francoise Mouly clearly gave deep study as to how the whole matter might be successfully reapproached, set up a publishing house named RAW Junior, and created and sold the idea of a really classy comic book magazine for children (it is hardcover and very elegantly published) to Joanna Cotler Books, an imprint of HarperCollins

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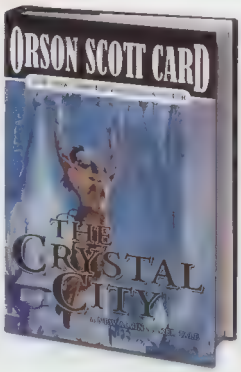

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Publishers. Now the third volume of the series has appeared in bookstores all across the nation, both chain and mom 'n' pop, and sold very well indeed and—behold!!!—the world has not come to its end.

If others in this area endeavor follow the prudent and sensible ways of Spiegelman and Mouly, we may yet find that comic books have clawed their way out of the ghetto.

The new Little Lit. ***It Was a Dark and Silly Night ...*"** (RAW Junior Books/HarperCollins, New York, hardcover, 48 pp., $19.99) is typical of the series in that it features some of the best cartoonists and writers presently working, is beautifully put together, and will not only amuse your kids, should you have chosen to produce any, but you, too.

So buy it and help a noble cause.

Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean have come out with their second children's book, ***The Wolves in the Walls*** (HarperCollins, New York, hardcover, 56 pp., $16.99) just in time for me to happily include it as a grand finale to this little survey. It is a lovely book, a very funny book, actually a very, very funny book, and I won't go on and on about it except to say that it stars an extremely brave and intelligent girl named Lucy, whose family is lucky to have her, and a silly bunch of wolves who should know better.

I refuse to say anything else about it lest I spoil any of the terrifying surprises and startling sights and hearty laughs it is prepared to generously bestow upon you and your beloveds. You'll just have to read it and see it for yourselves.

Gahan Wilson

The Anvil of the World. Kage Baker. Tor, New York, hardcover, 350 pp., $25.95. ISBN 0-765-30818-5.

Kage Baker, the author of popular time travel novels and stories featuring The Company, turns her hand to fantasy with delightful results in *The Anvil of the World*. Writing with wit and élan, Baker introduces a cast of charmingly eccentric characters and a world so richly rendered that it seems not so much newly born as freshly discovered.

Anvil consists of a series of novella-length episodes, each complete in itself yet part of a larger story that Baker unfolds with patience and cunning. The focus of that larger tale is a middle-aged man who calls himself Smith. Smith belongs to a "mechanically minded" race known as the Children of the Sun, who trace their lineage back to a liaison between a smith god and a fire goddess somewhere in the depths of time." This casually imparted information will play a major role in the novel; in fact, every bit of information, however seemingly trivial, fits snugly into the intricate jigsaw puzzle of Baker's interlocking plots.

We first encounter Smith in the city of Troon during the Festival of Respiratory Masks (situated on a thousand-mile-wide field of barley. Troon is so thoroughly awash in dust that her citizens suffer from chronic emphysema).

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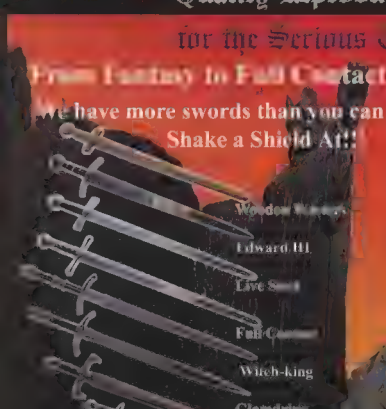

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Smith has come to Troon to escape a blood feud related to the practice of his profession: assassin. Former profession, rather, for Smith is determined to leave his bloody ways behind him by embarking on the seemingly safer career path of a caravan master in his cousin's transport company.

Smith's hopes are dashed when his maiden caravan voyage comes under an assortment of mundane and magical attacks whose target is unclear. Worse, it's soon apparent that the attackers have a confederate among the passengers or employees, all of whom appear to be hiding something. Among these characters, I feel compelled to single out the superbly named Lord Ermenwyr, product of an unlikely marriage between an evil demon and a beneficent goddess. The outrageously foppish Ermenwyr—rather like Johnny Depp playing Captain Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of the Caribbean*—minces, cringes, and charges through the pages of *Anvil* like a demented, swashbuckling conflation of Oscar Wilde, Bob Hope, and Errol Flynn. A decadent dandy with a decent heart, of which he is terribly ashamed, Ermenwyr deserves a book of his own.

But then, all the supporting characters—most of whom recur in subsequent episodes of the novel—are a colorful lot. So much so that they tend to overshadow poor, stolid Smith, whose killing skills may be nonpareil but who lacks all appetite for adventure. Indeed, so ambitiously ordinary is Smith that at first I couldn't help wondering if his central role was a mistake. It is not. Smith belongs both at the center and the periphery of this deceptively lighthearted romp, whose surface is as airy and antic as anything by Wodehouse but whose depths harbor a dark and subtle design worthy of Gene Wolfe — if Wolfe possessed a sense of humor.

The Battle of Evernight, Cecilia Dart-Thornton, Warner Aspect, New York, hardcover, 459 pp., $24.95, ISBN 0-446-52807-2

With this novel, Dart-Thornton brings her epic trilogy, *The Bitterbynde*, to a stirring close. In reviewing the second volume, *The Lady of the Sorrows*, I called the trilogy "a classic in the making," and now there can be no doubt that this strange and beautiful creation deserves that appellation. I envy those who have not yet read these books, for the experience of reading them as a continuous whole is likely to be even more magical than reading them as I did, with time and other books intruding between each volume. When read as a single work—as it was surely imagined and perhaps first written—*The Bitterbynde's* vast design will be more appreciable and Dart-Thornton's imaginative accomplishments more striking.

Dart-Thornton's heroine goes by many names over the course of these books, but I will always think of her as Imrhien, the name by which she was known in the first volume,

The Ill-Made Mute. There, and in *The Lady of the Sorrows*, Imrhein fought to recover her memory and purpose, in the process finding true love. Now she becomes a prize fought over by two great Faëran lords, King Angavar and his brother Morragan for, along with the recovered memories of her past, Imrhein has recalled that a way exists back into the lands of Faerie, from which Angavar, Morragan, and their followers have been exiled for millennia.

Dart-Thornton's genius for depicting the fair folk and the Seelie and Unseelie wights that inhabit the world of Erith blazes as brightly as ever in these pages. But only now does it become clear just how deeply immersed *The Bitterbynde* is in the capricious and often tragic (from the human perspective) logic of fairy tales, where to draw the interest of the fair folk is both a blessing and a curse, regardless of their beneficent or malicious intent. To give just one example of this merciless equation, humans like Imrhein, who have dwelled in the Faëran realms, will sicken to death with longing if removed from those beauteous environs (and Imrhein battles this sickness, called the Langothe, throughout *Evernight*). Dart-Thornton does not swerve from the terrible logic infusing her creation like some grim natural law, not even when it closes remorselessly around Imrhein, and her brave heroine, who has suffered much, must suffer still more. Yet even when all seems darkest tragedy, Dart Thornton does not forget that other law of fairy tale: enchantment happily ever after.

Eragon, Book One of the Inheritance Trilogy, Christopher Paolini, Knopf, New York, trade paperback, 512 pp., $18.95, ISBN 0-375-82668-8

In this first novel by 19-year-old Christopher Paolini, Eragon, a humble youth of mysterious parentage, finds a strange blue stone in the forest while hunting one day. The stone turns out to be a dragon's egg, which hatches into a female dragon named Saphira, the first dragon born in the kingdom of Alagaësia in many centuries, since an evil Dragon Rider named Galbatorix, with the help of other renegade Riders and dark wizards called Shades, overthrew the rightful ruling order and made himself king. Eragon and Saphira, who share a powerful bond, are sought by agents of the tyrant, bestial Urgals under the command of a Shade. As the first new Rider in centuries, Eragon possesses potent magic of his own, if he can be taught to use it. An old storyteller named Brom, who is more than he seems, sets out to instruct Eragon in magic, combat, and Dragon Riding while conducting the boy and his dragon to safety among the Varden, fighters dedicated to overthrowing Galbatorix.

I could go on, but I'm sure you get the idea. These days, imitation is the sincerest form of fantasy. From Tolkien, Paolini has taken his dwarves and elves and their languages (bits of which are set forth in an appendix). From Anne McCaffrey, he takes his dragons and their close telepathic and empathic bonds with their human riders. His magic system is based on the old idea of a primal language that "describes the true nature of things" and gives the speaker power over them.

Anyway, nothing in this book is as amazing as the story behind it. Begun when Paolini was 15, and self-published with the help of his parents, *Eragon* went on to sell nearly 10,000 copies. One of them was read by the 12-year-old stepson of a best-selling author, who recommended the book to his New York editor. In 2002, at the height of publishing Pottermania, Paolini sold his unfinished trilogy to Knopf for a sum reported to be in excess of $500,000. Such tales drive aspiring young writers to their keyboards and older, established writers to their liquor cabinets.

As I began to read, I found that Paolini's writing and storytelling abilities were on a par with much of the big book fantasy published today. And yet, not once did I have trouble believing that the novel had been written by a 15-year old—a talented one, to be sure, but no prodigy. It struck me that a number of adult writers with recent big fantasies from major publishers, best-sellers among them, are no better writers—and in some cases, are actually worse—than a moderately precocious 15-year-old boy.

But then, haven't publishers been encouraging this result for years, laboring to create a market for adolescent fantasy that enshrines every triteness, every cliché, that worships at the altar of imitation? Now, with Paolini, we see the logical outcome: no longer need publishers search far and wide for adult writers with tone sensibilities, junior high school-level writing skills, and imaginations in thrall to the creations of others. Now actual 15-year-olds can be employed to do the job! In fact, the shortcomings common to talented young writers like Paolini—slavish devotion to a literary model or models, lack of an original style, a taste for melodrama and bathos, callow portentousness masquerading as profundity, among others—are the very qualities prized in beloved older hacks. The difference is that Paolini, with luck and application, may outgrow them.

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By Emma Bull

You can dress for time-travel success on a budget, Part 2.

Maybe your town does a Dickens Fair around the winter holidays. Maybe the library is hosting a Jane Austen-themed fundraiser. Or you've heard about a mountain man rendezvous event a few hours out of town, or a big cowboy shooting competition and Wild West show where you're headed for a vacation.

You could go to any of those events in jeans and a t-shirt and have a good time. But they're even better when you're dressed for the historical occasion. They're your excuse to taste a little of what it would have been like to live in the past, clothes and all.

Library of Congress

Bustles, which were created by sewing a horsehair cushion under the back of the skirt, were all the rage during the latter part of the 19th century

Last issue I offered some notions for dressing for a trip to the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. This time, I'll try to help you fake the more sartorially complex 18th and 19th centuries. Again, the plan is to do it without a lot of money or your own costumer on retainer. Mind, if you catch the historical recreation bug, you'll want to expand and improve your costume. This column is purely to help you acquire the training wheels version of historical clothing.

Renaissance Updates

Before I launch into this second batch of tips and tricks, I have to correct something I said in the last issue. Remember, men, when I was talking about drawstring trousers for Renaissance peasants? Do you recall that I said you could cut them off and let them fray?

Well, um, when I suggested cutting them off at mid-thigh, what I meant to say was mid-calf. Ooops. I hope none of you followed the original advice and got put in the stocks for indecent exposure. But if you did, and went to the stocks, I hope your friends took photos. (Send me a copy and we'll print the best one in this column.)

I also found several online sources for the cotton Chinese ankle boots—kung fu boots—that I recommended for Renaissance and medieval footwear. Point your browser to www.imperialweapons.com/oriental/general/07kungboots.html or to www.blt supplies.com/sunfboo.html.

Where to Start

Now, back to the 18th and 19th centuries. The first thing to do, as always, is a little research. Look for the costume of your chosen period in paintings, illustrations, and political cartoons and, once you get to the mid 1800s, photographs. A quick visit to the library or the art museum will give you a sense of how people dressed. Take a look, too, at the Web sites listed elsewhere in this article for historical illustration and for photos from historical recreation events.

An overall point for the guys: Men's trousers didn't have back pockets until the 20th century. Cover yours up with a long upper garment, or cut them off and hope there isn't a faded line where they used to be. Or find pants with slash pockets in the back instead of patch pockets sewn on top of the fabric. Slash pockets aren't appropriate to the period, either, but at least they're low-key.

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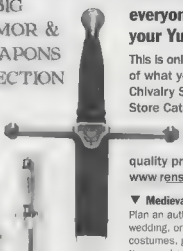

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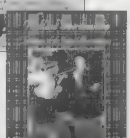

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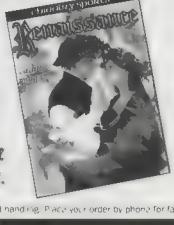

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The 18th Century

As I mentioned in the last issue, upper-class clothing for the time of the American Revolution can't be faked with things you can find at the thrift store or import shops. If you want to be a lord or lady visiting the Colonies in a skirted brocade coat or a gown with panniers on the sides or an elaborate powdered wig, you'll have to rent from a costume shop, spend a bit to make your clothes, or have them made.

The working class of the 18th century has a surprising amount in common with the peasants of the Renaissance. Guys, you'll need knee breeches. Proper ones of the period had a sort of double-breasted drop front called a broadfall, but if you can find an appropriate long vest, no one will see the upper front of your pants anyway. Find a pair of sturdy cotton or wool pants (not jeans, they have those distinctive side seams), cut off the legs below the knee, and use the extra fabric to make a tie to attach to each leg hem. FAsten the ties snugly around your upper calf.

Your shirt is still a pull-over-the-head one, opening part way down the chest, with a band collar or simple foldover collar to finish the neck opening, and sleeves gathered into band cuffs. You want a solid color for your shirt: white, or for homespun-looking fabrics, light blue or brown or some other easily homemade color.

Library of Congress

In this painting by Gainsborough, Mr. Andrews is sporting informal country clothing, while Mrs Andrews is a fashion plate in the extra wide panniers popular in the mid-1700s.

You can find good shirts for the period in Mexican or South American import shops. Be brave and look in the women s section of the thrift store, too, for large size women's tunic shirts.

An 18th-century vest, or waistcoat, was not at all like a modern man's vest. It was long nearly down to the wearer's thighs, and high-necked, with a narrow band collar around the base of the throat and buttons all the way down. It usually had flap pockets below the waist on either side of the front.

Impossible to find? Well, nearly. But there are at least two options you can try. The first is to find a long leather vest with fringe or some other outer garment that suggests you're a frontiersman, of necessity out of touch with fashion. In this case, the scruffier you look, the better.

The other option involves a new source, one that will prove useful in dressing for the next century, as well. Many formal wear stores have clearance sales in which they get rid of their worn or out-of-style rental tuxedos and other gear. These sales are a bonanza for us time-travel tourists.

A few years ago, the Nehru jacket came back into fashion for formal wear. Nehru jackets have high band collars, button all the way up the front, and have no lapels. If you can find a store selling used ones, look for one that fits closely through the body. Don't worry if it's a little tight through the shoulders, because you're going to cut the sleeves off. Leave a little sleeve fabric all around, maybe a quarter or a half-inch, turn it inside the arm opening, and sew it down to the jacket lining, so you won't look all raveled around the arm- holes.

If all else fails, find your shirt and wear it out over your pants. Roll your sleeves partway up and get the whole thing a little dirty. You're a farmer! You work for a living!

Accessories make you look as if you really meant to dress this way. You need a pair of over-the-knee socks (no gap between your socks and knee breeches!), a solid-color kerchief to tie around your neck, and ... ah, yes, the shoes.

Men's and women's work shoes of the period were clunky leather loafers with no difference between the right and left feet. Remember those Puritan shoes? If your closet

Costuming References on the Web

A really exhaustive list of references, advice, resources, and images for historical costume on the Web would be as long as this magazine. But here are my current favorites. Take your time and dip into their recommended links; they're the places where these folks learned their stuff.

General Costuming and History

Greater Bay Area Costumer's Guild
www.gbacg.org

Lots of images, problem-solving tips, and a comprehensive review of historical clothing patterns.

Mélieux, the Costume Site
http://melieux.com/costume

A sort of table of contents for costuming on the Web. Period, ethnic, fantasy links, links to photo and art collections—almost a one-stop reference source.

Lively Arts History Association
www.lahacal.org

Great links, including some to photo galleries of past balls and events hosted by LAHA and the Social Dance Irregulars. See what your fellow recreationists are wearing.

AlterYears
www.alteryears.com

A source for historical patterns and costume accessories. Their catalog, which you can order, is a good visual reference by itself.

Amazon Dry Goods
www.amazondrygoods.com

Amazon started as a supplier to Civil War reenactors, so their strength is in Victoriana. But they have a good catalog of historical patterns, a shoe catalog, and a wonderful line of reference books and all sorts of fun stuff.

Regency Costume

Sense and Sensibility Clothing
www.sensibility.com

After you've checked out the patterns, view their vintage images collection for inspiration, and not just for the Regency period.

Regency Neckcloths
http://homepages.nildram.co.uk/~awoodley/regency/tie.html

A glimpse—just a glimpse—into the intricacies of the neckcloth.

Victorian Costume

Victoriana in General
www.victoriana.com

Truly Victorian
http://trulyvictorian.netfirms.com

The pattern drawings show you how Victorian women's clothing was designed. The gallery of photos of clothes made from the patterns are a real inspiration.

Cowboy Gear

Buckaroo Bobbins
www.buckaroobobbins.com

Again, the pattern drawings show you what you're trying for in the look of the Old West. They sell some ready-to-wear and fun accessories, too.

Wild West Mercantile
www.wwmerc.com

There are several large on-line vendors of period western and Victorian clothes; this is only one of them, but their site will give you an idea of what's available.

Three-Eyed Willy's Cowboy Site
www.billpalmer.com/~Willy.htm

One man's summary of the experience of Cowboy Action Shooting, including creating an alias and where he got his clothes.

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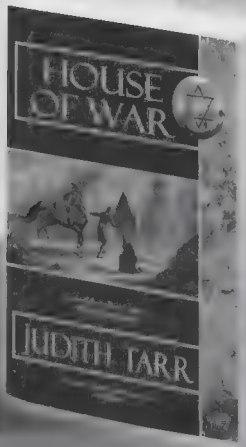

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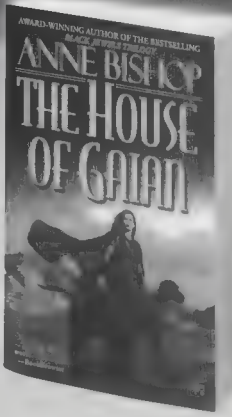

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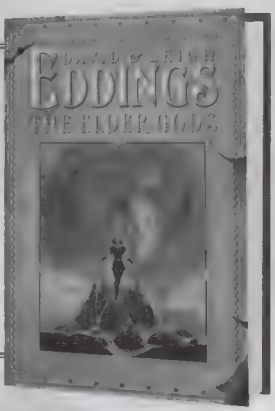

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or the local thrift store doesn't have anything like them, you can make do with the Chinese cotton kung fu shoes I recommended last issue, the kind that come up high on the instep with elastic inserts on either side. If you're a Colonial, you could also try Native American-style moccasins. After all, the neighbors wore them.

For women, the long, gathered-at-the-waist skirt and the chemise or peasant blouse you used for Renaissance festivals are right for this period, too. You'll need a bodice over them which in this case can be a tight-fitting vest. Don't get a man's suit vest, though, with a contrasting satin back. Front and back should be made of the same fabric. For headgear, there's the mob cap, the classic cotton bag with a ruffle all around. Or you could tie a kerchief over your hair.

Simple printed fabrics were widely available in the 18th century, so one- or two-color prints without too much detail will look right in your costume. Woven stripes or checks are period appropriate, too.

The Regency Era

The English Regency was, strictly speaking, when George III was officially too nutty to rule, and his son, the Prince of Wales, was the Regent until his father's death. Loosely, it's the period from the very late 1700s until 1820, and is the period in which Jane Austen's novels were set.

Almost all the Regency period events you'll want costumes for are formal events. The exceptions are the frontiersman rendezvous gatherings for which 18th century work clothes will do nicely.

For Regency dances and Jane Austen teas, however, you'll need to dress up a little. Ladies wore low-necked, high-waisted gowns in lightweight fabrics, with either short puffed sleeves or long tight sleeves that ended at the knuckles. Colors for young ladies were white or pastels, but married women had more choices. The ideal was the body skimming look of ancient Greek and Roman clothing. Lord Elgin's marbles had arrived in London and touched off a craze for all things classical which was reflected in women's dress and hairstyles.

You may find a gown with the right silhouette at a thrift shop. If you have a place in town that rents women's formal wear, it may sell off used rental gowns now and then, and is a good source for potential Regency or Victorian ballgowns. India import shops sometimes have long, high-waisted dresses that look right for the period.

If everything you find in formal wear and imports just seems too, well, modern, turn to the lingerie department. Look for a cotton nightgown with just the right lines. With the addition of a ribbon at the high waist or neckline or hem (or all three), it won't look nightgown-y at all. Wear a slip or another lightweight gown underneath to keep from being the talk of the town.

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Ballet slippers or those infinitely useful Chinese cotton Mary Jane shoes are appropriate to the period and excellent for country dances. Carry a folding Chinese fan and put your hair up like a statue of Aphrodite, and you're ready.

A note for events that include dancing: both men and women wear gloves. During the Regency or Victorian eras, no one would have arrived at a ball without gloves, and having danced both with and without, I'm firmly on the side of with. You'll avoid that sweaty-palm feeling, either yours or your dancing partner's, whenever you take hands across the set. Just remember to never eat with your gloves on.

Gentlemen, you're going back to that formal wear rental sale. You need a tail coat. The Regency man's coat was significantly different from modern tails in several respects, but the modern version is close enough. Knee breeches and white or black stockings were essential formal wear early in the period, but by the end of it, men wore long trousers even to balls, so you can choose which you prefer.

The waistcoat of the period was a waist length version of the 18th-century one. It had a stand up collar and sometimes opened into short lapels, but always buttoned a lot higher than modern vests do. It was often made in gorgeous colors and fabrics. This is the period when men's clothing shows the beginning of the regimentation that results in the modern business suit, the flashy waistcoat was the last gasp of the era when men could wear sky blue brocade coats trimmed with gold lace.

You can make do with any relatively high-buttoned vest in a dressy fabric. And you will need a vest, unlike the tail coats of the Regency period, your modern tail coat's buttons are just for show.

You'll also need a white shirt. An authentic Regency dress shirt is not much different from an Elizabethan one, but since hardly any of it shows under your coat and waistcoat, all you need to worry about is that it has a foldover collar that you can wear turned up. Because, yes, you're going to wear a tie.

Actually, it's a neckcloth, or cravat. You need a rectangle of white shirt fabric, about two to three inches wide and long enough to go around your neck twice with some left over for tying. Turn your collar up, and lay your neckcloth over it with the center at your collar button and the ends backward over your shoulders. Wrap the ends so they cross at the back of your neck, bring the ends around to the front again, and tie them in whatever way looks elegant. Tying a neck cloth was an art in the Regency era, with dozens of styles made fashionable by famous dandies. Look for paintings and drawings of the period to give you ideas, and make up your own signature style. If all else fails, a neat square knot will look fine.

Men's shoes of the period included beautifully polished calf-high boots and snug-fitting ankle boots. If you're wearing long trousers, any plain-toe shoe or boot that you can dance in will do. Those Chinese cotton shoes will come to your rescue again, whether you're wearing long pants or knee breeches. But if you're wearing breeches, and you want to do the thing right, you can wear dancing slippers. The Chinese cotton shoe industry offers a version of those, as well, see: http://www.bltsupplies.com/sunifboo.html and scroll down the page to "U15004 MEN COTTON TAI CHI SHOES (V CUT)."

Library of Congress

These three ladies are dressed à la Polonaise *in ankle-length skirts that were ideal for walking. This style was popular at the end of the 18th century.*

Victorian Formal Wear

For the Christmas vintage dance with a Dickens theme, the men have it easy. Victorian formal wear for men was much like modern white-tie formal: black tail coat and trousers, white formal vest, tuxedo shirt, and white tie. You can rent it all, or buy it at the formal wear store clearance sale, or find it used at the thrift store or at theater company rummage sales. The modern versions aren't exactly right, but you'll blend in.

Women get more of a challenge when dressing for formal Victorian events. Again, look at photos and paintings of the era to get a sense of the silhouette. It changed drastically over the time between the 1850s and the 1890s. During the Civil War, the fashion was for huge skirts worn over hoop petticoats. The bustle, which moved all the bulk of the skirt to the back, appeared in the 1870s, went out of fashion in the late 1870s to early 1880s, then returned larger than ever (literally) in the last half of the 1880s. The Gibson girl look, with its flared, ungathered skirt and enormous sleeves, dominated the 1890s.

If this sounds more like engineering than costuming, you're not far off. Still, the potential for faking exists. You can buy a hoop from a bridal shop, or that formal wear store that you're beginning to wonder how you did without. You may luck out and find one at a yard sale or thrift store in the company of the wedding dress it was bought for. Or you may find a full-length nylon net petticoat or two, which make good substitutes for the layers of petticoats that supported those big skirts before hoops came into fashion.

Comb the thrift stores for the bridesmaid's dresses your friends complained of wearing five years ago. You're looking for something with a very fitted bodice and a really big skirt. Over your hoop, it will look pretty convincing. You should know, though, that authentic ladies' dresses of the 19th century were two-piece gowns, with separate bodices and skirts and, in the bustle era, a shorter overskirt gathered up in swags and pleats and ruffles.

Wear ballet slippers (ties around the ankle are a nice touch) and pink stockings, which will make you look quite sophisticated but not actually fast.

Even the sky isn't the limit for colors in

Continued on page 98

EOS.. TRANSCEND THE ORDINARY

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DANCING DAD

BY LIZ WILLIAMS
ILLUSTRATION BY LORI KOEFOED

If you buy a very old house and hear scritch-scratching in the attic, it's probably just squirrels. Then again, it might not be. Do you think you should go and check?

IF

I have heard many voices across a thousand years, sounding [illegible] finally telling [illegible] know sense from nonsense.

[illegible] her own mistakes.

[illegible] more so now. The stars burned no light, and for years I could see [illegible] dancer the one who is always there, spinning at the edge of the world [illegible] and the sun came beneath my feet and the furnace heat of the sky against [illegible]

Her name was Shadnieff Mastaret. She wanted a wild love, bright as the sun and deep as darkness, and so she shut the windows, threw [illegible] incense onto the fire, and summoned me. She called me by my own name, raised from the depths of some shadowy arcanum, written in blood on the day of my making. Much later, Lilith said, "You don't have to answer, you know, just because someone bawls your name in your ear. You're not a dog. I don't know what got into you."

I don't know either. I suppose I was bored, or perhaps I just wanted to see what it was like; that small gray world, filled with dun mayfly souls. Shadneth called my name three times and on the third I answered. Stars rushed by, the air rang like a bell, and I fell like a stone into the body of a girl, on a rainy night in Constantinople, in 1923.

I don't think that Shadneth was expecting quite so spectacular a success. She was no professional necromancer: just a bored girl, at a loose end and excited by the thought of the forbidden. We all like to play with fire, sometimes. I was rather surprised at my sudden incursion into the human. Her body was cold; wet as snow and fragile as a shell. Her heart fluttered against her brittle ribs. I tried to tell her that I did not want to hurt her, but my voice sounded thunderous in the vaults of her head. She cried out and clapped her hands to her ears. Somewhere, beyond her, was warmth and I reached out to it, but she screamed again and plucked her hand from the coals in the brazier. Clearly, this matter of possession was something we would both have to work at. I think she fell; the room spun up and I found myself looking out of her eyes at the yellow plaster of the ceiling. Her heels drummed the floor. The door burst open and people swarmed in. They picked her up and carried her across to the bed, where they forced something sour and honeyed down her throat. She swallowed convulsively and dropped into dreaming. I had time to think, then, and to consider the consequences of my position.

Possession is such an ambivalent word. The Churches are unanimous in their disapproval, saying that it is common knowledge that people become possessed by demons. Yet we demons know that humans possess us: beguiling us with their desires and capturing us in the webs of their will. We find ourselves imprisoned in cooler flesh than our own, frightened and bewildered. I thought to find a new friend, instead I found myself securely stuck in the chilly veins of an amateur sorceress, now out for the count. I was cold beyond bearing and I wanted to go home. I think I howled.

I was held in her body, afraid and raging, until the morning. The sun came up in a torrent of light above the city and Shadneth flinched as she opened her eyes. I stirred within her, as gently as I could. She rolled over, trying to escape the lodger in her head, and fell off the side of the bed. Servants came running in and helped her back. Then a man came, dressed in a robe the color of dawn. From the sleeve of the robe he drew a small bag and from it he took a pinch of a black powder. An attendant lit the brazier and he cast the powder into the coals. It flared up with a hiss. I watched with interest. He raised his arms to the ceiling and cried out a single phrase. After a moment's reflection, I recognized it. It was an incantation, predictably enough against demons. It was evidently somewhat past its best. I tried to tell him this but my voice roared out from my hostess' stretched throat. A confetti shower of plaster fell from the ceiling and the brazier spat sparks. My voice was too loud; my essence too hot, I was too much altogether for this small, neat world. I gave up, sulking.

The tedious process of exorcism continued throughout the day. Priests and clerics of all descriptions trooped through the House of Lanterns, all bent on becoming the one who liberated its heiress from her besetting succubus. I did my best to cooperate, but nothing seemed to work. Then there was a tapping of heels on the parquet floor and a woman came in. She had dispensed with the customary robes and was wearing a rather modish suit with a rabbit collar. Her title was Luna, and she was a priestess of Cybele, Our Lady of Beasts. She was unwilling to tolerate any nonsense. She threw everyone else out of the room and bolted the door. Then she turned to the poor prone figure on the bed and said, "Right. Enough's enough. I want you out of there on a count of three."

In the smallest voice I could muster I said, "I can't."

My voice was a gale. Words billowed through the room. The windows rattled. The priestess clapped her calfskin gloves to her ears.

"Don't *speak*. Just nod your head, yes or no."

I managed a little nod.

"That's good. Now, are you trapped?"

I nodded.

"Do you know how we might release you?"

I shook my hostess's head.

"Very well. There's only one thing I can think of, and it's a little risky. Not to you, to Shadneth, so I suggest you listen carefully. If she dies, you will not necessarily be free, and it will take a considerably greater effort to disentangle you: one which is beyond my capabilities."

With care, I nodded. I don't know how she persuaded the family to accept her proposal. I was dimly aware of a disconsolate muttering throughout the hallway as the assembled religious were told that their services would no longer be required. Then an attendant came, with a stronger sedative that sent both my tortured hostess and myself into darkness.

When we awoke, we were no longer in the House of Lanterns but somewhere echoing, filled with a watery light. The first thing that met our gaze was a face: vast, malign, and upside down. The carving, which bore an uncanny resemblance to myself, was framed with stone coils of serpentine hair. They had brought us to the cisterns beneath the city, the water reservoirs that served Constantinople even in these modern days. They had brought me to this damp, dark place away from the dance of the sun, to keep themselves safe from me. The Luna whispered all this into Shadneth's ear. To my chagrin, I discovered that the Luna was not to be the one to lead the exorcism: this was an honor reserved for the high priestess herself. "But I'll be here," the Luna whispered. "I'll be beside you."

I tried to ask her what was going to happen, for they had not exorcised any of my kind for a very long time. In the old days, more of us had been young and foolish, but now there was only me. Ghosts may possess and be possessed, it's true, but they have no more tenacity than shadows and a breath or a word can send them shrieking into the wind. I was an altogether different proposition.

They had paid for a sacrifice, which surprised me. This was the 1920s, after all. I did not see who it was: perhaps one of the janissaries, whom the alchemists created in their hidden laboratories beneath Pera. Attendants strapped down my hostess's protesting head, so that all we could see was the ceiling.

[illegible]

The Luna whispered [illegible]ur, "Watch the smoke. Watch it drift and [illegible] over and over again." And we were both entranced. I began to follow the smoke up into the vault of the cistern and slowly it took [illegible] pouring from Shadneth's eyes and mouth. A crimson drop blossomed like an anemone in the water. Someone cried out; a shadow sprang past me into the smoke and I followed, but as my pinions reached free above her head, Shadneth began to fight to keep me in. I wanted only flight and air and sunlight, but she began to reel me down, using the beat of her heart and the pulse of her blood, all the human snares. She was stronger than I; this was not my world. She wanted nothing more, she would have said, than for me to be gone, but the unconscious self

is immune to reason. It wants what it wants, and blindly it sucked me back and hooked me in

The Luna's face was very close. I could smell her narcissus perfume. She was staring into Shadneth's eyes and somewhere she saw mine looking back at her- a spark of gold in an empty head

"It hasn't worked," she pronounced. The high priestess shoved her aside

"Of course it's worked. Everyone saw: the demon was cast forth."

"No, it went back in. What did you do that for?" she demanded of me

I shook the girl's head and, once started, I couldn't stop. It rattled to and fro like a broken puppet

"Stop that!" She held Shadneth's head still by sheer force. The girl bit her lip and a drop of blood ran down her chin. I chased it with her tongue

"Oh, I don't know what to do," the Luna said, in despair. "Get them back to the house. We'll try to think of something else."

[redacted]

They'll ask us to come to the House of Lanterns and laid Shadneth on the [redacted]. Then they left her possessed to wait out another long night. I lay with her, like a seed waiting. Somewhere in the depths of the night, Lilith came. I dragged the girl's head from her uneasy dreams and opened her eyes. Lilith was leaning against the mantelpiece, examining her taloned nails. Her fiery feathers fluttered in an unknown wind, but in the chamber the candle burned quietly

I opened Shadneth's mouth and spoke, as though through a ventriloquist's doll

"Help me," I said

"Can't. I'm afraid. Not unless you're willing to see her unmade, not just dead, child, but unsouled. Do you want that? D'you care?"

They say that we prey on living souls, that we are beyond compassion, but I was young, with a child's fondness. I did not want to see Shadneth hurt. I said so

"You should have been more careful. If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times .. "

Her bronze skin shivered and ruffled. She blinked golden eyes. I was beginning to feel very sorry for myself

"Nothing I can do," said heartless Lilith, reaching for the brazier. "I'm sure someone will think of something. Bye."

"Lilith, wait—" I cried, but she was already gone, in a shower of fire

Life settled down a little after that. Gulan Massaret continued to advertise, covertly, in the esoteric press for the person who might free his daughter. Enough people answered, over the course of the next year- mathematical mystics from Syria; Gnostic clerics from the Maghreb; the drug makers of Ghent and Antwerp. None of them achieved even partial success. Massaret was reluctant to let his daughter's condition be generally known, for obvious reasons, but it is impossible to keep a secret in Constantinople. The city absorbs lies and confidences and, as befits the cradle of alchemy, changes what it hears. Some said that Shadneth was mad, or ill, or possessed by the spirit of her grandmother, the formidable Alicien

A surprising number even knew the truth

The new sciences of the mind began to take a hold in Vienna and Geneva, and Massaret enticed its principal proponents to Constantinople and the House of Lanterns- anything, he reasoned, was worth a try. Shadneth was analyzed for hours. She lay on the couch and stared at the ceiling, and when they asked her to talk about her dreams, she only smiled. At last, despairing, her father had her shut away in the high attics of the House of Lanterns. In the evenings, we would sit behind the filigree bars at the window and watch the lights come on across the city, in all the other gilded cages in which the lost children of Constantinople are kept

At length, people forgot poor, mad Shadneth. Gulan Massaret was given a diplomatic posting to Paris, in an attempt to stop the growing threat of war. He left a handful of retainers to care for his daughter, but it proved to be care in the most minimal sense, for they were afraid. And so, lonely and tormented, Shadneth turned to her constant companion for comfort: to me

Gradually, over the years, we had achieved a kind of equilibrium. I learned how to be still, and quiet, and gentle. I learned how to speak to her in a small voice, so that she could understand me without pain. Together, we explored the vaults of her mind. She led me through her dreams, and I helped her to understand the mysteries of number and symbol, which together make the rules of the world. I danced for her, and she watched every move and turn I made, spinning down the pathways of her brain. When at last her father came home, years later, we had danced so much that I had almost forgotten who and what I was, and so had she

Her father was not the same man, either. They had unmade him in the crucible of the internment camps. His mind wandered and soon he took up permanent residence in the rooms below our own. After a few months he died, and shortly after that we discovered that the door to the stairway had been bolted shut. Occasionally, voices floated up through the floorboards, we recognized none of them. No one brought food, but Shadneth did not seem to need it. We kept to the bed after that, becoming absorbed in the play of the sun across the plain of the ceiling. We watched the inconstant light- how it shifted and turned and spun away. Darkness and sunlight became the same: only a different day, running round

Winter came over and again. Frost had the window and icicles clustered beneath the sill, but Shadneth and I spent all our days in the hollow places of the head and sleep. If we drifted down, we had the thoughts of the city to choose from and other dreams, too, under the snow: the dreams of the lions in the high hills, the mauve mind of the bees in the hive, honey dreaming, slow and other and endless. Sometimes the voices grew louder, closer, but Shadneth and I no longer cared. We were listening to light and the fall of shadows, to warmth and air and winter

Years ago now, I had told myself that if I trusted Shadneth, she would find her own answer. If they left her alone, she would work out a way. No dramatic exorcisms; no drugs, no long dissection, only Shadneth herself, taking her own time. And somewhere on the long roads of the mind, we parted company at last, shook hands and said good-bye. I watched Shadneth as she rose from the bed, unlocked the bolts with ease, and walked down the stairs. I listened until her footsteps stopped and the voices below, one by one, fell silent. Then I went on my own way, soaring toward the sun and a brighter day

"What time do you call this?" Lilith asked when she saw me, and I laughed at her and ran through the stars to the shores of the world. Just before I reached them I looked back, once, to where Shadneth was singing, and then I was gone, dancing and away.

If we drifted down, we had the thoughts of the city to choose from.

I have been looking into the crystal and have seen myself. I am tempted to put quotation marks about that last word, but I shall not. Is the self I

ment, although it would be dangerous

What my dear Estar says—what Her Royal

That's not you

years, and my prison hospital office

OF SOIL & CLIMATE

Are you a Night Person or a Day Person? Think carefully—we're not asking about what time you like to get up.

I cannot hear through the crystal, yet I know what is being said It is all so terribly, awfully familiar

Me (motioning toward the couch) "We don't have to use that To tell you the truth, they only let me have it in here because so many patients expect it. If you'd rather sit the way you are now and just tell me that's fine

He (squirming) "I'll stay here"

Me: "Good It's actually very comfortable, though That leather's as soft as a glove, and it's nicely upholstered To confess, I have napped there sometimes Now let's begin What's troubling you, Jim?"

Jim. "When I was a kid ... think you ought to know this to start with, Doc I always felt like everybody was, you know, shutting me out .. "

Me. "Yes?"

Jim. "I wasn't, you know, very good at anything Baseball or anything."

Me. "Neither was I"

Jim: "I—I watched a lot of TV."

Me: "You feel that led you to your present difficulties?"

Jim: "Uh . No Maybe it really would be better if I could he down"

And so on. It will not do to be contemptuous of these men, and now that I find myself as I am, a head taller than anyone, with a sword at my side, I find myself less tempted to contempt

Which is good if I watch the crystal long enough will I not see myself in the office of some other psychiatrist? Perhaps my patients—but no. I am here. A stroke, perhaps?

Later. The bird has returned. The Armies of Night are mobiliz ing. We were fools not to attack while the sun was up—but we were such fools, and there is no point in denial. I could have ridden With what? Half the Palace Guard, 20 or 30 other men-at-arms, and a few boys Or a dozen men-at-arms Half a dozen. We would have been wiped out in the Pass of Tears if not before Perhaps after this

If there is any, "after this"

The night had awakened him He had yawned and stretched, blinked in the sunshine, and wondered where he was. Wondered with the comforting certainty that he would soon remember

A certainty that had proved entirely unfounded There were no bars, and there was no cot. The horrors of imprisonment had vanished, and with them the certainty of regular meals, books, and the Net. He had slept in fern, in a cool and shadowy place where a beetling cliff held off the sun. The sun was setting

He squinted up at it: half down the sky. It might, he told himself, be midmorning instead, he knew that it was not. There was a warm, sleepy feel to the air that could not have come before late afternoon.

How did you tell time save by looking at the sun? He glanced at his wrist. Numbers? Why weren't there numbers there?

There were none, and he began to walk Surely numbers were attached, somehow, to the gauging of time.

A tree of a species he did not know stood at the edge of the clearing, a graceful tree with light gray bark and leaves that turned copper when the wind blew. He paused to admire it.

"You'll need a sword."

Who had spoken? He saw no one until a slender girl in russet silk stepped from behind the tree "You'll need a sword," she repeated. "I know of one I'd better not leave my husband to show you where it is, but I can tell you."

"How do you know I'll need a sword?" The question amused him because he had never expected to say anything of the sort.

There was no slender girl, only the slender tree. I'm hallucinating, he thought. I've never done that in my life, always been less interested in patients' hallucinations than I should have been. This is fascinating

He walked for miles, south as well as he could judge His clothes, he discovered, had no pockets (like the orange jumpsuits) but the purse on his belt held two small coins, and there was a knife on his belt as well, a short, single-edged knife with a broad, thick blade

A phallic symbol? He had never really given much credence to those

It was a good, sharp phallic symbol in any event; he used it very carefully to open nuts he brought down by throwing sticks The nutmeat was small but good, the nuts large and satanically hard. He nicked a finger in spite of all his care, and walked on

The sun was almost down when he found the road, a faint dirt road such as men make for themselves where the county will not make a road for them, a single, narrow, dusty track. It revived his optimism, and he followed it with enthusiasm, up a low hill and into a deep valley where the declining sun was lost behind wilder, more ragged hills, so that his own steps brought evening

For hours after that he followed the road still, by starlight and moonlight. The moon, a small and pearl-like moon as round as a button, set; another rose, larger and holding a leering face Leering or not, it shed more light and he resolved to press on

Animals that were not wolves howled and bellowed in the forest to either side. As he passed a lightning-blasted tree, he heard a roar he felt certain had come from the throat of a tiger

At last there came a time when he could walk no longer He sat down, careless of where he landed, and pulled off the soft boots and sodden woolen stockings His feet had blistered. They hurt, and were infinitely tired. His legs ached and throbbed so that, exhausted though he was, whole minutes passed before he slept

The light woke him, or nothing. Twilight nearly night, he thought. Or dawn, perhaps. Dawn seemed more likely The sun was out of sight behind the hills. He began to walk again, saw a lightning-blasted tree, and turned about. He had been that way, and there was nothing save big trees robed in moss

Far away, a tiger roared.

The road wound deeper and deeper into the valley, and it was night Very near, just around the next bend, a woman screamed

He was running toward it even as he told himself that he must run away from it. She screamed again, stirring an instinct he had not known he possessed. A dark form bent above—what? A bundle of rags? A mossy trunk? He saw the flash of fangs, plunged the short blade into something that was not quite a boar, and was thrown backward He kicked with both feet and somehow managed to regain those feet

A half-clothed, frantic woman thrust a cudgel at him He seized it and struck the beast, great blows with a four-foot stick as heavy as iron, blows each of which would have killed a man It fled at last, but not before he had felt its claws.

It was twilight when he woke again, and a woman held his head in her lap and sang, the wordless crooning of wind in treetops He sat up, weak, sore, and sick

"I heal," she told him. "There is a spring whose waters give strength." With her help he got to his feet, steadying himself with the broken limb with which he had beaten the beast. She wept beside him; he longed to comfort her and tried to as clumsily as any other man.

The spring rose among rocks, it was deep, or at least the light of a small and pearl-like moon made it appear so. He drank and drank, and it was cold and pure and good, and it did indeed make him stronger, as she had promised "I lost some blood, I think," he said

She nodded without speaking Her robe of green velvet left a shoulder bare

"Did it hurt you?"

"She killed my husband." The woman in the green velvet robe shrugged, and he knew her sorrow was too deep for words.

"We'll bury him," he said.

She shook her head "He would not have wanted that. What he

would have wanted is what he now has, to lie in the forest until Nature returns him to the soil. In time, new growth may spring from his root. I hope so."

He stared at her for a moment, then recalled that David had sprung from the root of Jesse. "What will you do now?"

"Follow you." She glanced at the heavy limb with which he had routed the beast. "As long as you have that, and longer. If I try to go with you, will you drive me away? Throw things?"

"Of course not." He picked up the limb and examined the ragged breaks at its ends, he could scarcely see them, so deep was the twilight, and his fingers told him more than his eyes. "This could use trimming," he said. "I think I left my knife in that animal, whatever it was, but it may have fallen out. If you'd rather stay here while I go back to look for it—"

She shook her head, putting her arm through his. She smelled earthy and sweet, he thought, an odor he associated with Boy Scouts and camping out. It was a clean perfume he had not smelled in a long, long time and was happy to greet again.

He could not have found the place without her, a fact he admitted to himself long before they came upon it. "It might be better if we wait 'til sunup," he said. "I doubt that we can find my knife in the dark, even if it's here."

"If you want to lie down, I will lie with you gladly," she told him, "but the sun will not rise for many rains."

"Then I want to lie down." he said. "I'm so tired I've stopped being hungry."

"Rest. I will weep for my husband first."

He did not, but followed her to a fallen tree a few steps away.

She knelt beside it. "They strip away the bark to eat," she said, "and when the tree is ringed, he dies."

A tear fell on his hand, and he put his arm around her. She was—she has been, he told himself—a holy woman in some strange cult in which girls who had been taught to accept such things were married to trees. That seemed plain enough, but he found it hard to imagine a place where such things happened. Where was he, in California? And how had he gotten here?

"We will rest now," she said at last.

"And I'll comfort you," he told her, to which she only nodded and wept.

She spread her gown on the ground. They lay upon it together, and it was soft, furry, and warm. When they were cuddled as one, spoon-fashion his mother would have said, her gown folded itself over them, that covering, too, was warm, furry, and soft.

For a time she wept on, but he kissed her shoulders and the back of her neck and drew her to him, and her weeping ceased.

The beast woke him, looming above him, huge and dark, not with a sound (for it was terribly silent) or the brute, dull claws that caressed his torn face, but by the animal stink of it. It was, he decided later, half ape and half bear.

"I have your knife," the beast said, "and I've cleaned it for you. I thought you'd like to have it back."

He froze, certain that he was about to receive it in the chest, half a minute, perhaps, passed until he realized that the beast was holding it out to him in darkness.

Too numb to speak, he accepted it, pulled it gingerly below the strange stuff covering him, and returned it to its sheath.

"I was starving," the beast said. "You have to understand that. Starving, and I attacked a tree. That was all."

He spoke without thinking. "If you attacked me now, there wouldn't be much I could do."

No," the beast said, "but you don't have to worry. I killed farther down." It paused. "We kill only when we have to eat. We're not like the Night People. Not even like you Sun People."

He was about to say that it had attacked the woman, but it vanished into the shadows before he could speak.

He slept again until the woman awakened him. They made love, and washed afterward in a small, cold creek. "Is it always night here?" he asked her.

"No," she said.

She had brought the broken limb with which he had beaten the beast, he carried it as they walked deeper into the valley. He had lost the road in the night, and they went by almost invisible forest paths.

"I don't suppose you know where we could get some breakfast?" he asked her.

She only shook her head.

"What are Sun People?"

"You are," she told him.

"Then you must be a Sun Person too."

"I am a Tree Person," she said.

A long while after that, while they were looking for a place where they could ford the river, she asked where he had come from.

"I'm not even sure," he said, and then, as if a fact that explained nothing explained everything, he added, "I'm a psychiatrist."

She nodded encouragingly, the trees were beginning to drop their leaves. One blew past her face.

"I had an office in the Brighton Hills Mall," he said. "It was very up-scale. Everything there was very up-scale. Orthodontists and furriers, and so on. Saks Gucci. I charged—well, it doesn't matter."

Memories flooding back.

"I went to prison. I remember now. That's what happened."

"What is prison?" she asked.

They forded the river. It seemed darker than ever on the other side, but they were going toward the light, which cheered him. Three men attacked them, he fought with the desperate courage of a man who knows he must win or die, killing two with shattering blows of the severed limb. The third fled.

He picked up the sword one had drawn against him. "A woman was going to get me a sword like this a while ago," he said, "and I didn't want it. I want it now."

"I don't like it," the woman with him told him.

He searched the dead men, finding soft, thin cakes that were not quite tortillas, and dried meat. "I don't eat that," she said when he tried to give her half.

"For Sun People?"

"They were Night People."

He ate everything, learning in the process that he was ravenous

The beast woke him, looming above him, huge and dark, not with a sound, but by the animal stink of it.

His meal finished (it had not taken long), he picked up the sword once more and examined it. "Yesterday."

Had it really been yesterday? Two days before? Three? He had gone from a changeless afternoon to an unchanging twilight.

"You said you didn't like them," he told the woman. "I didn't either. To tell you the truth, I thought they were silly. When you've needed something and not had it, you don't think it's silly anymore, I suppose. If I had a gun, I don't think I'd know what to do with it. I have a pretty good idea of what to do with this."

"I am of trees," the woman said. "That wars on trees."

"I'm flesh," he told her. "Flesh is what this wars on, not wood. I want it just the same."

The blade was somewhat discolored save where it had been whetted sharp, as long as his arm and three fingers wide. He tried to think what that would be in inches and failed.

He made cuts in air.

"Don't," she said. "Please."

"Then I won't," he promised her. The grip was bone, the guard and pommel iron. "Do you know," he said, "I don't think I've ever told you my name, or asked yours. I'm Tuck."

"Nerys." She hesitated. "I am called Nerys. Is that a good name?"

He smiled. "Of course." She seemed to expect something more, so he held out his hand. "Pleased to meet you."

She took it, clearly uncertain as to what she was to do with it. "May I see your sword, Tuck?"

"Certainly." When she released his hand, he held out the sword, hilt first.

She took it, holding it level between them. "Have I been a good friend to you, Tuck?"

"A very good friend," he said.

"I am going to ask a favor. It is a small thing, and only one favor—the only one I will ask. Will you promise, before you hear it, to do me this favor?"

He nodded. "You have my word, Nerys. If I can do it, I will."

"You can. That club you have borne was my dead husband's arm. I have loved you doubly because you bore it, even as he. Should the bone of this sword fail, you must replace it with wood from his arm."

He was about to say that it was not likely a bone hilt would fail when he noticed that fine dust was cascading from the hand that gripped the hilt. He said, "I will—trust me," instead.

She returned the sword to him, and he looked down at the grip. It had been smooth and polished, he felt sure; it was rough now, and hairy with splinters. He rubbed it, and bone dust fell. He drew his knife, and the bone split and crumbled under the edge, falling away until nothing remained save the steel spike that held the iron pommel.

When he looked up, she had gone. He called her name and searched for her in a hundred places, and at last he sat down with the club that had served him so well and cut away the smaller end. The pommel was screwed tightly to its steel spike; he had to carve a sort of wrench of the tough wood before he could unscrew it. But he did at last, and managed, with his knife, the end of the spike, and the sharp point of the sword itself, to bore a passage for the spike through the rough wooden grip he had carved.

When the work was done and the iron pommel back in place, he felt that a full day had passed—this though the twilight seemed neither deeper nor lighter than it had been. "I must go on for a few more miles today at least," he told himself. "If I don't reach civilization soon, I'll starve." He was about to throw aside his shortened club when he felt (a deep and somehow peaceful emotion he could never have put into words) that it wished to remain.

He picked it up and ran his hands over the smooth bark, seeing it for the first time as it saw itself: a mutilated tree. He dug a hole in the soft forest loam with the blade of a larger and coarser knife the other dead man had borne, and planted the big end of the club that was no longer his in it; then he dug shallow graves for the two men, one to either side of the thick cutting he had planted, and lay them in their graves and covered them with earth, and the earth with leaves and fallen branches. When all that was accomplished (and it seemed neither darker then nor lighter) he felt that he should pray. He had never been a religious man, but he did his best.

He had dusted off his hands as well as he could and was on the point of leaving when he caught sight of the larger, coarser knife and realized that he had neglected to inter it with its owner. Unwilling to undo much of what he had only just finished, he put it through his belt.

Which was well. The beast had said it had killed, he found its kill by the odor of rotting flesh—a child, a girl, he decided, of perhaps fourteen. Save for her eyes, her head was largely intact; little remained of the rest but scattered bones. He collected as many as he could and began to dig, muttering, "Poor kid," over and over.

"Are you going to bury those here?" The voice was a girl's.

He looked behind him and saw her half concealed by shrubs.

"I can show you a place," there was a long pause, "that she'd like better."

"You can?" He had not looked at her as he spoke, and there was no reply. When he looked around at last, she was gone.

A dress that had once, perhaps, been ankle length had been reduced to a blood-stained rag. He gathered the bones and the head into it as well as he could, though he had been unable to find one thighbone and the other protruded no matter what he did.

Then he was ready to leave, but the girl had not returned. He decided to press forward, carrying the bones and the head, not in the hope of finding her, but to bury them when he came upon a particularly suitable spot.

The land rose, and some light returned. At last he found a hut that was almost a small house, with three plots of vegetables on three bits of almost level land. There were roots he did not know, and beans like no beans he had ever seen that most certainly could not be eaten raw. He tasted two of the roots, and decided that he could eat the second, which he did, scraping the dirt away with his coarse knife.

Behind him, the girl's voice said, "This is where."

She stood at the door of the hut, starved and insubstantial—"Like a bad hologram," was the way he put it to himself. "There?" he said. "Right where you are now?"

"At my feet."

He nodded, knelt at her feet, and began to dig. "Did you know her?"

"I thought I did."

A hole a foot by two feet would be sufficient, he decided. He roughed it out with the knife blade and began to deepen it. "It's cold here."

"That's me," the girl said. She sounded sad.

"You're cold?" He looked up.

"Maybe you'd give me a little blood?"

She had sounded serious. "If you mean a transfusion—"

"You could just scratch a little line on your arm." She paused, and in a moment he realized that she was trying to take a deep breath but could not breathe. "A few drops? Please?" (Another deep breath that would not come.) "I'll be your friend forever. I swear it!"

He paused, sickened by the realization that he had lost utterly the life he had once known. This was a new life, in a new place, and no child—not even she—could have been more hapless and forlorn. "Friends answer questions for their friends," he said slowly. "Will you answer questions for me? Not just one question, or two, but a great many?"

"Yes."

"I need help," he continued, "figuring out who I am and where I am. You'll help me? As much as you possibly can?"

Yes?"

"OK." He stood up and took the short, broad-bladed knife from its sheath on his belt. "This isn't sterile, I'm sure." He wiped it on his sleeve. "I wish we had some way to sterilize it. But we don't, and clean steel will have to do." Carefully and slowly, he reopened the cut in his finger

Seconds passed before the first drops of blood appeared. When they did, she bent over the cut eagerly, not licking or sucking it as he had expected but wetting a finger and smearing her nostrils again and again. "Deeper? Please? Just a little deeper? It won't hurt you."

It stung, but he ran the sharp blade down the cut again.

She drank now. Her lips were frigid when they pressed his hand, but grew warmer—as she herself grew more real, an actual and even ordinary girl, far too thin but very much alive, just entering womanhood.

At length she straightened up. "It's stopped," she said. "I'd ask you to do it again, but I know you wouldn't. Would you?"

He shook his head.

"But you'll bury me? Please?"

"Those are your bones?"

"Of course. I—we—it's hard to explain."

He knelt to dig again. "Try."

"It's like not being able to sleep. Well, it's really not like that. It's not being able to rest. If you could dig and walk around and talk to people, and maybe plow or hoe the garden. But you could never just sit in the shade and fan yourself, or shut your eyes."

He looked up. "You're her ghost? This was you?"

"Of course."

"You live here?"

"I lived here," the ghost said. "It got to be nearly night, and the Night People started. Night comes really soon to this valley. Everybody left when the sun did except me. I had to bury Mama and get the roots in before they rotted. I never did get them all in."

"You're a Sun Person," he said, still digging. "Like me."

"No," the ghost told him, "I'm a Dead Person."

He hesitated. "You look real."

"Because of your blood. If it was sunshine here like it used to be, you'd see. I think I'll fade pretty fast anyway. But I'm grateful. It feels really good, even if it won't last."

He judged the hole deep enough, picked up her head and bones and lowered them into it, then began to replace the earth, mostly by pushing it back into the hole with his hand and the broad blade of the coarse knife. "What's your name?" he asked.

"It was Mej."

"That's short. Maybe I could put up a marker."

The ghost shook her head. "That's just so somebody can find them and dig them up again. I was born here and I died here, and this is where I stay."

"Will you disappear when I finish filling the hole?" Within himself he added, "Will I?"

"Do you want me to?"

He shook his head.

"Then I'll stay a while, but pretty soon I'll want to go someplace warmer. I don't think you will either. Why should you?"

"I used to be a psychiatrist." He stopped shoving dirt into the hole to think. "Do you know what that is?"

"Someone like you."

"Yes," he said. "Yes, that's it exactly. May I tell you?"

She nodded.

"I treated people who had sick minds. I tried to make them well. Or if I couldn't make them well, I tried to get them better, help them just a little. It was hard, very hard, but I tried hard, too, and sometimes I could make a real difference. People who had hardly been able to function at all were able to function normally sometimes. Oh, they had quirks, moments of intense fear, and so on. But they functioned better than many others, and were happy now and then. That's the most any of us can hope for, to be happy now and then."

"I was happy here," the ghost said.

He had finished filling the hole. He piled the rest of the earth on it, forming a mound that he would later tamp down. "Before your mother died, you mean."

"No, after. While I was burying her and getting in the roots. I wasn't happy when she was so sick. I couldn't be. But afterward it was just me. I could do anything I wanted. I went to bed and listened to the owls, when I woke up I lay in bed and listened to the wren and the song sparrow." She laughed, a strange but almost living sound. "Once I put bread beside the bed, so I could eat before I got up. When I got it in the morning the mice had nibbled out a place." She laughed again.

"I went to prison," he told her, "because I helped a patient too much, and my records were very important to me. My notes. I had to know what my patients had told me, so I could review it. I couldn't remember everything, so I had to write it down. My patients had to know those records would never be made public." He tried to remember what those patients had called him. Doctor Something, and finished weakly by saying, "I'm Tuck, by the way." His mother had called him Tuck.

"I'm Mej. Are you going to step on that, Tuck?"

"No," he said. "I don't believe that would be right. I'm going to pat it down with my hands."

"Thank you. I think I'll get a little sleep."

When he looked around for her again, she was no longer there. He shrugged, selected a likely vegetable from the small garden, and walked on, eating as he walked. "There are no such things as ghosts," he told himself, "yet I'm nearly sure patients see ghosts frequently. From those two facts, two more emerge readily. The first is that things which do not exist are frequently visible. The second: I myself am a patient.

"If I am a patient, I must assist in my own cure; but how can I, if I do not understand the nature of my disease? Answer: By examining the symptoms, I can deduce the nature of my disease.

"First symptom. I frequently mutter to myself when my mouth is full." He chewed vigorously and swallowed, grinning.

"That symptom is disposed of. My disease remains, of course. Second symptom. I have lost all contact with reality. Presumably I am in the prison hospital in a vegetative state. To return to reality, I must comprehend the nature of my delusions. This darkness presumably represents the ethical desert of the penitentiary. It is less now than it was because I have been taken to the hospital where things are somewhat better. The vertical trees reflect the vertical bars on windows and doors. Take that one." He directed his own attention toward an inoffensive sapling. "It's even the right thickness."

Seizing it with both hands, he shook it until its dying leaves rattled. "Just so, Doctor Tuck. I cannot effect my escape by shaking the bars. I am still in prison. What if I take my sword to it?"

He drew his sword and slashed half-heartedly at the sapling, scarring the bark. "No result. But what about a serious attack?" He cut, right and left and right again. Chips flew, and soon the sapling fell.

"Listen!" said a familiar voice at his elbow.

Tuck spun around. "Nerys?"

"Here I am." She stepped out of the shadows. "Did you believe I had left you?"

He nodded.

"I was with you. Where else should I be? Weeping among the living while I watched my husband's body rot?" She pointed to the sword he held. "There is my man."

"This?" He held the sword up.

"There." Her finger slipped between his to touch the wooden grip he had made. "Your hand warmed that. Thus you see me."

"When I carried the club—" He let the sentence trail away.

"Again! Listen!"

Screams, he thought.

Silence succeeded the screams. he visualized another Tree Woman like Nerys in the grip of a second beast, and dashed away.

Before he had run far he struck another road. the first real road he had seen, a road of pounded red clay wide enough for horsemen to ride four abreast. The man thundering toward him rode alone, and if he had ever had three companions it seemed likely they were dead—his clothing was bright with blood, which streamed from his head and shoulders.

Tuck stood aside panting and let him pass, receiving two drops of blood on his face for his trouble, and three on his shirt logging now, he topped a rise. Dead men lay in the road. not far from one lay a horse too badly wounded to rise, with blood pulsing from its nostrils. A second horse shied as soon as it caught sight of him, its reins dragging, its head up, and its eyes wide.

He stopped, careful not to meet its gaze. "You are mistaken," he said. "I don t hate horses or want to hurt them. I love horses." It was not true, and he felt obliged to amend it. "I like horses. Before Sally left me, we had three horses. two geldings and a beautiful little Arabian mare. You're a stallion, right? You would have loved her." He edged closer, careful not to look directly at the brown stallion with the trailing reins. "Sally loved her a lot more than she ever loved me. but I liked her anyway. She was as affectionate and gentle as any animal could ever be."

At the word, he had gotten a foot on the trailing reins. He picked them up, still careful not to look directly at the brown stallion. "You're a fighting horse," he said. "I'm not a fighting man, but I'm a man who'll fight when he has to. For the present that may be good enough. It may have to be."

Mounted, he wheeled the stallion and trotted up the slope.

They were nearer than he would have guessed, one covering the woman while six more watched. Those six turned at the drum roll of the stallion's hooves, and one managed to raise a javelin before he was ridden down. The sword with the wooden grip split the skull of another. Frantic with victory, Tuck dropped the reins and threw the coarse knife at the man separating himself from the woman. The pommel struck his eye, and in a moment more he was ridden down as well.

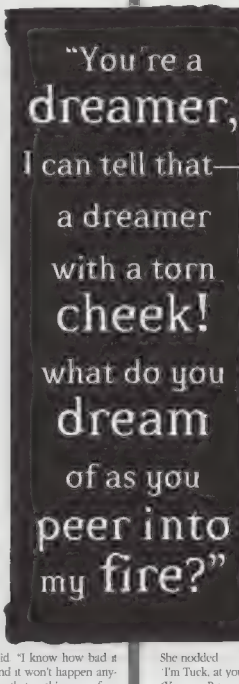
The woman was naked and weeping, and for an hour or more unwilling to rise. Tuck found the ruin of a silk gown, covered her with it, and sat beside her stroking her hand. "It was terrible," he said. "I know how bad it was. Believe me, I know. Now it's over, and it won't happen anymore. For the rest of your life you'll know that nothing you face will be as terrible as what happened here today, and that you lived through this and came out of it better and stronger." He said this and much more again and again, perhaps a score of times.

At last she said, "Will they come back?"

He shrugged. "You would know better than I."

After that he lifted her onto the brown stallion's saddle and mounted behind her. "Where are we going?" she asked.

"Wherever you want to."



It will be more dangerous if we go back," she told him, "but I would like to go back."

She had pointed as she spoke. He turned the brown stallion, holding it to a rapid walk. "Where are we?"

"This is the Valley of Coomb. You must be a stranger here. Are you from the west?"

"From a far country," he said, and to himself added, "I think."

"You are a brave man, if you are rushing to meet the night, O my husband. But I knew you for a brave man when you slew those who had slain my guards."

"I'm not your husband," he said.

"You have seen my nakedness. Do you not know the law?"

"More than I want to know," he told her, "but I don't think I've come across this one."

"If a man beholds the nakedness of a maid, he must restore her honor by wedding her, if he himself is unwed. That is the law for common women. But if a man beholds the nakedness of a royal maiden, he must put away his wife, if he has one, to wed the royal maiden and restore her honor, O my husband. Have you a wife?"

"Not anymore."

"Indeed. Indeed." She looked over her shoulder, smiling. "You that saved me are harmed the worse. Though I am most grateful for the hand that braces my waist in your saddle, might it not perhaps be some trifle higher?"

The light failed as they followed the road into the Valley of Coomb. "Here our poor folk left a hundred eatings gone," she told him, "for this valley is the very Herald of Night."

"I'm surprised you wanted to come back here."

She wiggled closer, although they were already very close. "I have you to protect me. Besides, we met their group as we were about to leave the eastern side, thus they had only entered. Had there been others in deeper night, they would have attacked us sooner."

"I met bandits deeper in," he told her.

"Our own people?" She turned to look at him over her shoulder.

"Not my people," he said, "but Night People, which I suppose must be what you mean."

"My people are the Sun People," she said, "and because they are mine, yours as well, O my husband. Do you not know me?"

"No, but I should introduce myself first."

She nodded.

"I'm Tuck, at your service."

"You are Prince Tuck, my consort. My own name is Estar." She coughed apologetically. "Princess Estar. Please do not grovel."

"I'll avoid it if at all possible."

The smile she directed at him was almost a grin. "Thank you. I have met others, now and then, who did not know me. They groveled, and I hate that. That is a poor man's sword you wield so well. You are not rich?"

"I have nothing," Tuck said.

She dimpled. "Except me."

"No, you have me. You're the loveliest woman I've ever seen I'm afraid that I'll wake up any minute and you'll be gone."

"You," she said, "are going to make a most satisfactory husband."

There was a farm at the western edge of the valley. He left her some distance from it and explained to the farm wife that she must sell a gown.

"Sacking," Estar said as she pulled it down, "at least you will no longer see that my hips and legs are fat."

"I've seen your hips, and your legs, and they are perfect. Both of them."

"Both legs you mean, and you are looking very far down. You have no money?"

"Nope. I paid the woman for your dress with what I had."

"You could have become rich by searching the bodies of those you killed back there. They took my jewels."

Tuck shrugged.

"You are right. Swords, not jewels, make a king. It was a saying of my father's."

"He's passed away? I'm sorry to hear it."

"Died?" Estar shook her head. "He seldom speaks. He is old, and sometimes he will not eat."

"I see."

"If he were dead, I would be queen. You, my husband, would be our king until I bore an heir and he reached the age of maturity. But I do not want my father to die. Does that surprise you?"

"No. Certainly not."

"That is well. Look above those trees."

She pointed, and he discovered an unexpected pleasure in the slenderness and whiteness of her arm. His lips brushed the shoulder that held it in the lightest and swiftest of kisses.

"Do you see—" For an instant she seemed to choke, and coughed. "The flag? It is green and yellow, and so not easily seen above the trees."

"I think so."

"It flies from Strongdoor Tower. There is yellow stone beneath it. Perhaps you cannot see it."

"I'll take your word for it," he said.

"The baron's name is Blaan. He is my most loyal vassal, or says loudly that he is, and would wed me if you would step aside for him. Will you?"

"No." A woman—this woman—was much too precious.

She dimpled. "You have not seen how large and strong he is. You will shake with fear, O my husband."

He smiled back. "I doubt it."

"We must see. I cannot ride back to Cikali in this gown. Thus we must ask his aid. He has, I should think, three hundred men, if not more. Will you kill them all for me?"

"I doubt that it'll prove necessary."

The guard at the portcullis looked incredulous when Tuck said that the woman who shared his saddle was Princess Estar, and gawked when he recognized her. Baron Blaan welcomed her, ignored Tuck, and turned her over to a housekeeper and a bevy of maids. He was, as she had said, a tall, beefy, and quite muscular man.

Tuck seated himself in the best chair in the Great Hall and stared at the fire, which was larger than any summer evening could have required.

He had refused to turn over someone's records. Who had she been? Records showing he had helped with what? But by the pictured a dozen patients and former patients. A woman accused of killing a child—accused on slender evidence, presumably, since they would not have wanted her psychiatrist's notes if they had a strong case. He himself had been psychoanalyzed 10 years ago, as all analysts were at the beginning of their careers. Could it have been those notes they wanted?

Could he have murdered a child?

He decided that he could not, but that he could certainly have been accused of having done it and worse. Anyone these days—any man, particularly—could be accused of anything by anyone.

"That's my chair you're sitting in," Blaan said.

"Sorry." Tuck rose and moved to another.

"That's my chair, too."

Tuck sighed. "No doubt it is. This is your castle and you own all its furniture. I thank you for allowing me, a mere prince and your guest, to use it. But if you want me to vacate it, you need stronger arguments."

"A prince? You don't look it. Of what nation?"

"Yours."

The word hung there for perhaps half a minute. At last Blaan said, "You're a dreamer. I can tell that—a dreamer with a torn cheek! What do you dream of as you peer into my fire, dreamer?"

He had been thinking of the prison wood shop to which he had mutely been assigned, his practice in the prison hospital, and his fill-in work in the library. "Stevenson," he said. "Blinking embers, tell me true, where are those armies marching to, and what the burning city is that crumbles in your furnace?"

Blaan blinked too; he was saved by Estar, who swept into the room, resplendent in cloth-of-gold, with two maids to carry her train.

Blaan rose, and Tuck with him.

"My husband is not obliged to bow save on the most ceremonial occasions." Estar's voice would have frozen sea water. "You, Baron, are not thus exempt."

"You have married this—this .." For a moment Blaan could only stare, at a loss for words. "This *vagabond!*"

Tuck laid a friendly hand on Blaan's shoulder. "Bow."

Blaan spun to face him. His sword was in his hand so quickly it seemed impossible that he had actually drawn it. *"Guards!"*

Estar screamed.

Tuck dodged behind the chair. "I think you need to consider what you're doing. Will you listen to reason? Just for a minute?"

"I will not only listen to it," Blaan told him, "I will voice it. The princess has wed a vagrant, a decision she must deeply regret. I will free her from her miscegenation. In gratitude, she will accept me and obey me as a good wife should. Or suffer the consequences."

The last word was nearly drowned in the pounding footfalls of the guards, a score of big men with helmets and spears.

"Wait!" Estar raised both her hands. "I am your Princess Plenipotentiary, the Regent of our King."

Tuck kept his eyes on Blaan. "Your lord's following a suicidal policy," Tuck said.

Estar's voice rose above the hubbub. "Hear the Prince Consort!"

"True loyalty lies in saving him from it."

Blaan lifted his sword for an overhand cut, edging to his right.

"That will preserve your own lives too. Obey him now or you'll die as traitors, and quickly."

"Die!"

Tuck got the chair up in time to block the swift sword cut, though the edge bit deep into its back. He grabbed one end of the wide sword-guard, and Blaan jerked to free it.

Estar spoke again. "Do none of you wish this barony? Not one?"

As if by magic, the blade of a spear emerged from Blaan's chest. His blood followed it, his eyes glazed, and he fell.

With all the posse she might have exhibited at her coronation, Estar approached the guardsman while her maids scurried behind her, trying to snatch up the cloth-of-gold train they had let fall. "Congratulations, My Lord." She smiled. "A good cast!"

The king ...y in bed staring at the embroidered canopy eight feet above his snowy head. "He will speak at times," Estar whispered. "Let us hope this will be one." More loudly she said, "This is my husband, Father. The ceremony will be at sunset—we're hoping that will cheer the city as well as giving our warriors a new leader."

There was no response.

"Already he wears the seal, Father. Don't you see it?" She touched the heavy gold seal suspended from Tuck's neck. "The seal you wore for so many years?"

There was nothing to indicate that the old man in the huge bed had heard her

He is wise, and certainly much too wise not to listen to the advice of a man much older than he who has devoted his life to statecraft. A few words from you, now, might help him shape a better path for our whole nation."

"No," the old king said distinctly. "Go, Estar. Leave me."

"Better." Tuck muttered to her.

"Is it really?" She scarcely breathed the words. "I would have said worse."

"It's better," Tuck's tone was conversational, "because it doesn't point to Alzheimer's, which is what I was afraid of. I can't treat that with what we've got here. This is senile depression, I would say, and I may be able to do something."

"Really?"

"Really. Will you trust me alone with him for half an hour or so? I won't hurt him, I promise, or demean him in any way. But this will be tricky and may not work."

When she had kissed him lightly and gone out, he took off the seal and pulled a chair up to the bed. Seated, he held the seal by its chain, letting it swing gently. "I wanted to give you a better look at this, Your Majesty. Do you see it? Look carefully, please. I know you wore it for years, but you were very busy during all those years. Did you notice how beautiful it is? See how it catches the light as it swings back and forth. See how it turns as it swings. It's bright gold, pure gold, and my valet polishes it every time I change clothes."

There was no response.

"I'm going to try something to take away the pain, or make it lighter if I can't take it away entirely. The thing I'm going to do here this warm afternoon is called hypnotherapy. Hypnos is one of the names of sleep. Did you know that? That's why it's called hypnotherapy. It's sleep therapy, sleep healing. You're old now. You can no longer grasp a sword, and you hate that. It hurts you inside, I know. You can no longer walk like you used to, and that hurts too. I understand. But there's so much pain, so much pain like that. I'm sure you would like to get away from it for a while, even if it was only a little while. Haven't you noticed that it no longer hurts when you sleep? It doesn't. You're warm and comfortable then, and those things no longer matter, do they? It's so much better to sleep, and not hurt.

"To sleep and wake up better and stronger with no pain. Are you still watching the seal? That's fine, but I can see your eyelids are getting heavy. Close them if you want to. Rest your eyes. Get away from the pain while the seal swings back and forth."

When Tuck left the king's bedchamber, the king was holding his arm. He did not grip it tightly, and with its slight help walked almost as well as Tuck himself. The crimson velvet retiring robe he wore was trimmed with ermine and was positively regal. He greeted half a dozen courtiers by name, while they bowed almost to the rich carpet of the corridor, or gaped open-mouthed.

"I am feeling better," he told Estar when they found her in the music room of the suite she now shared with Tuck. "It has been a great help to have you and this prince, a loving couple I can trust with everything, as my regents. I hope that you will consent to continue in your service to our nation."

"We will, Your Majesty," Tuck said.

Still too astonished to speak, Estar nodded agreement.

Later, in a curtained room, Tuck sat before the crystal watching the golden seal he had hung above it swing. "Wake," he murmured. "Wake up. This is a dream, a good dream, but only a dream. Awake. Awake. Awake."

It took much longer than that. But a moment came when he realized he was no longer watching the seal—that he was sitting on a small, hard stool with his eyes shut.

He opened them and saw the stacks of the prison library. A cart showed that he had been reshelving books. He rose from the gray metal stool and went back to work.

That night a whistle shrilled in Cell Block Seven. "Lockdown!" a guard shouted. Two or three voices echoed him derisively: *Lockdown. Lockdown.*

Thirty seconds later, every door in the block that was not closed already slammed shut and every bolt in every door shot home.

"Wish it didn't make such a racket," the other man in the cell said, and sat up.

"We are the Night People." Tuck gripped the bars and looked out, wondering vaguely what the other man's name was, and whether he would ever recall it.

"What you mean by that, Doc?"

He turned and looked at the other man—at Clark. "You have to kill the Night People or lock them up. If you don't they will murder and rape and burn. It's the same everywhere, in spite of differences of soil and climate, of languages and manners, of laws and customs. We are the Night People, and they are safe from us now."

"You're quotin' again, ain't you?"

Tuck nodded. "Wordsworth."

"My granny used to talk about them," Clark said, "them dime stores."

Murder, rape, and burn. And hide evidence.

There were patients next day, both alcoholics. When he had finished with them, he went to the library, secreted once more in the stacks, he tried by every method he knew to return to his dream.

Next morning he was in the library again. He ate lunch and endeavored to treat a man who fantasized—only fantasized, he insisted—about doing horrible things to women with long dark hair.

The next day there were no psychiatric patients and he filled in at the hospital, looking at sore throats and sprained ankles. In that fashion day followed day. And evening after evening he read while Clark watched TV. Had a book guided him to the dream? He hoped one had and searched his mind in spare moments, for if such a book existed it might be found again, found, it might guide him back. Might guide him home.

Once Clark asked him what he would do when he got out, and he said, "Lead those who'll follow me to blunt the next incursion." Clark asked him no more questions after that.

So one year passed, and another, until at last a patient explained that his sleep was haunted by a plaintive girl. "She's real skinny, Doc, and looks real poor. She keeps tellin' me and tellin' how I promised something, only I never done it."

Tuck nodded. "Something in your unconscious mind is trying to enter your consciousness. Have you any idea what it might be?"

The patient nodded. "Yeah, I do. That's why I acted crazy until they let me in to see you." He held out a scrap of wood. "A guy asked me to give you this, a long time ago. I promised I would, only I never did. You can just pitch it out if you want to."

Tuck examined it. It was a simple cylinder with a clumsily cut hole down its axis.

"Thing is, he got your old bench when they moved you up here out of the wood shop, and he found it in a drawer. He thought it might be a piece of somethin' you'd been workin' on, and you might like to have it."

"It's a wooden grip for a sword," Tuck told him.

When the patient had gone, he rubbed it between his palms, pressed it to his cheek, shut his eyes, and (feeling not at all foolish) kissed it.

There were hands upon his shoulders, he knew at once whose hands they were. "The Sun People have need of you," Nerys said, and somewhere a tiger roared.

He rose, wrapped in crystalline mist, and took three steps.

Escaped the crystal. He paused, brushing his lips with the end of the quill. *Half the city has burned. I have rallied the survivors. We must free Estar, and because we must, we shall. The Armies of Night are scattered, expecting no concerted attack. With luck and guts we'll teach them a lesson that will last a long, long time.* ❧

wizard mountain media

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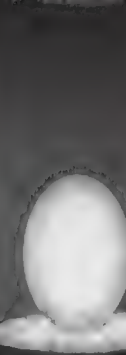

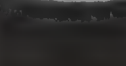

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Sometimes it seems like the more time we have, the more chances we have to make the same mistakes over and over again.

Divided

By William Shunn Illustration by Eric Fortune

-1

Donny Chavez was walking south on Main Street in Salt Lake City, trying not to think of Grace, when he noticed the little store Ye Olde Miscellany Shoppe, read the faded gold lettering stenciled on the glass. Standing on tiptoe, hands thrust deep in his jacket pockets, he could make out very little through the soot grimed glass. But pressed by a nameless compulsion, he seized the tarnished doorknob and slipped inside, leaving the sounds of afternoon traffic behind in the wide street. A scattering of wind-blown orange leaves dogged his heels.

The interior of the shop was warm with flickering lantern light. Donny could make out shelves crowded with cookie tins and old bottles, burnished copper pans and kettles, smiling straw dolls, decorative snuffboxes and brandy snifters, doilies and serviettes of yellowing lace, large pasteboard calendars, and oversized front-porch thermometers. Atop the solid wooden counter sat a brass call bell, a hand-cranked cash register, and a small sheaf of receipts impaled on a spindle. Behind it stood the shopkeeper, a short, stocky man wearing a burlap apron over a clean white shirt. A pad and pencil peeked out shyly from one of the apron's pockets. The man's hair was dark and neat, brilliantined, parted in the middle. His smile was wide and only the smallest bit predatory.

"Afternoon, lad," said the man in an accent Donny couldn't identify. "And what can I help you with this fine day?"

by Time

"Er, not leaving, I guess," said Donny. "You know, I never noticed this place before. It looks like it's been here forever, though."

The shopkeeper shook his head. "Don't change the subject, lad. Tell me about her."

Donny knitted his eyebrows. He had taken the afternoon off from work, complaining of stomach problems, but it wasn't until now that his belly truly started to hurt. "I'm sorry? What?"

"Your one true love. Tell me about her."

Donny's mouth opened and closed a time or two, and he felt he was fighting for air.

"She must be quite a girl to render you so speechless," said the shopkeeper. "Where is she? Let's start with that."

"I—excuse me, but I think I made a mistake coming in." Donny turned to leave. Since Grace had left to study abroad, he'd done all he could to put her out of his mind.

"You wouldn't be here by mistake," said the shopkeeper, and Donny stopped cold, a prickling between his shoulder blades. "So why aren't you with her, lad? Where is she?"

Donny took a deep breath, cheeks heating. "The other side of the world," he said quietly. He didn't turn around. "Jerusalem."

"Hmm." The shopkeeper drummed his fingers on the counter. "Not an insurmountable barrier in this age of e-mail and air travel. There must be more to it than that. But each thing in its turn. Describe her to me."

Donny turned back to the shopkeeper with a deep sigh, feeling harried and put upon. "Well, she's about this tall, blue eyes, blonde—"

The shopkeeper snorted. "No, lad. I don't want a police sketch. Describe her to me so if she walked through that door a year from now I couldn't possibly confuse her with anyone else."

"OK, OK, hang on." Donny closed his eyes, but whether to concentrate or just from frustration he wasn't sure. "Have you ever seen a ... a lioness, like in the zoo? She stalks around looking completely at ease, like—like she's walking on mist, like nothing in the world even touches her—but at the same time you know she's coiled like a spring, she could go off any second. And—and when she catches sight of you, it's like there's something smoldering in her eyes, and if you can hold her gaze without flinching you feel like it's a victory, like you've passed some kind of test."

"That's good, that's good." The shopkeeper stroked his chin. "So this girl's on the other side of the world."

"Like I said."

"Does she know how you feel?"

"No. Maybe." Donny shrugged helplessly. "I don't know."

"So if she knows, it's not because you told her. But now that she's gone, you wish you'd come straight out with it."

Donny ran his hands through his hair. "She's looking for her purpose in life—her calling. It would have been selfish of me to try to stand in the way."

"You could have gone with her. You could go now."

"It's not that simple. I don't have any money. I barely stay ahead of my bills. I can't just uproot my life and go."

"It's easier when you have no money."

"But I have a job, an apartment. I have family."

The shopkeeper scratched his nose. "A lot of excuses is what you have."

Donny's fists clenched. "You think I don't want to go? You think it doesn't keep me awake at night?"

"Lad, are you here for a reason or not?" asked the shopkeeper, fidgeting impatiently. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Donny barked a bitter laugh. "Yeah, right. Short of a magic carpet, I don't think so."

The shopkeeper bent and rummaged under the counter. "Looks like I'm out of magic carpets, sorry. Popular item. I usually keep them up front when they're in stock."

"Very funny," said Donny, but he felt the prickling start up again in the center of his back.

"I might be able to scare one up from the back room," the shopkeeper said, straightening up. "If not, I may have something else you could use. The next best thing, as it were. Just a minute." He lifted a lantern from the wall and trotted off through a door behind the counter.

Donny leaned his head on the cold, iron cash register. The sunlight outside had thinned, and the gloom gathered about him like a fist. "This is ridiculous," he said, but he had the strangest feeling that something was listening, and disapproved.

The shopkeeper returned shortly with a cylindrical glass container, roughly the size and shape of an oxygen tank. It had two gauges and a stopcock at one end. "Here you go, lad," he said. "Best thing I can offer you. I hope it works out."

Donny raised his head. "What in the world is that?"

"Time in a bottle," said the shopkeeper proudly. "Fully charged, too. Made sure of that myself. Not as good as a magic carpet, but it'll do in a pinch."

"You can't be serious."

"I am serious. Do you want it or not?"

Donny felt that prickling a third time. "I told you I don't have any money."

The shopkeeper laughed. "I wouldn't have any use for your money. But there's something inside you you really don't need. You cling to it like a child to a blanket, but plenty of people need it more. Some lepers I know, for example."

"What is it?" asked Donny.

The shopkeeper lay the tank on the counter and bent down again. When he stood, he held an old cigar box and a sheet of parchment. "It's a personality trait—your meekness, your long-suffering, your resignation to fate. For lack of a better term, let's call it vishuddha. In a word, it's the part of you that lets you accept the cards you're dealt without complaint."

Donny shivered. "Come again?"

"Just sign here on the dotted line, and your vishuddha becomes mine to do with as I please. I can frame it on the wall, sign it over to some other poor schmoe, or just let it molder here in this cigar box."

Restless, Donny paced in front of the counter. "Sure. And what do you get out of it?"

"It's business, OK? It's how I make my living. Do we have a deal or not?"

"I don't know."

"It's not like your soul, you know. It's a part of you you won't even miss."

Letting out a breath, Donny turned the parchment so he could read it. "I probably have to sign this in blood, right?"

"You've been reading too many stories." The shopkeeper handed Donny a fountain pen.

Donny read through the contract. "I don't believe I'm doing this," he said, and he signed it.

The shopkeeper blew on the ink, folded the parchment neatly, and closed it up in the cigar box. "Lad, you're a wiser man than you may ever know." He patted the glass tank. "Now give me back my pen and let me show you how to work this."

0

Donny flew to Burbank two days later. The ticket wiped out his meager financial buffer, but he felt he had little to gain from a walk across the western deserts. He hitched a ride to the shore near Malibu, slept on the sand, and awoke in the elastic-gray moments before dawn. Caressed by warm autumn breezes, he walked to the edge of the Gulf of Santa Catalina.

He wore khaki trousers and a flannel shirt and carried an olive-drab duffel bag. The most terrifying part of the trip had been waiting for the duffel at baggage claim. When it arrived intact, he let out what seemed like 24 years of pent-up breath, a lifetime's

comprehension. It was then he started to believe that he had passed behind the surface of the workaday world and into that realm where its routines, restraints, and ritualized drudgery no longer applied. Growing up poor and fatherless on the wrong side of the Salt Lake Valley, Donny had never believed in that realm, though he tried to keep faith in it, as some people doggedly worship gods who consistently prove themselves powerless. He studied hard and made his way through college on scholarship money, but when he emerged with his computer science degree the only job he could find was writing technical documentation for a microchip manufacturer. With as much of his soul as had drained away in one year, he often wondered what would be left by retirement.

Turning in his notice had been frighteningly easy.

Donny knelt in the sand, opened the duffel, and drew out the long glass tank. He had attached it to a harness of military webbing, which he now secured around his chest and shoulders. He stood for a moment staring over the water, at the surfers already out and daring the margins of the deep. He thought of Grace, waiting for him half a world away, and reached back to twist the stopcock on the tank ever so slightly to the right. At that moment, the edge of the sun crested the smog-shrouded mountaintops to the east.

The waves before him froze in place, turning the surface of the ocean to a greenish-blue expanse of powdered-sugar icing. He gasped, overwhelmed by a cavernous silence. A moment before, he'd been practically unaware of the pounding of the surf, the screeching of the gulls. Now the absence of sound was as huge as a thunderclap.

Donny looked around. Seagulls hung motionless in the sky, like kitchen magnets stuck to a refrigerator. Surfers perched under the overhanging waves as if their boards had been pounded into green plaster. The cars on the distant highway might have been parked there, despite the plumes of frozen exhaust trailing along behind them. Sunlight streamed over the mountains like a crack of light spilling under a door, and the sun rose no further.

He wiped his glasses, put them on again, laughed. It was even better than he'd anticipated. It was a miracle. The world he'd feared he could never leave was truly and finally behind him. This was the world he had never dared believe in.

He craned his head to check the gauges over his shoulder. Five years, read the first one. Five years of bottled time riding high on his shoulders, to do with as he pleased. He reset the second gauge to zero. It would run only when he dropped back into normal time, counting the hours as they trickled by.

Donny reached once more into his duffel—a bottomless satchel of Far Eastern manufacture which the shopkeeper had thrown in for free with the purchase of the glass tank. From inside he withdrew a crumpled orange life raft. As the raft inflated itself, Donny retrieved his compass, sextant, and navigational charts. He zipped up the duffel, loaded the raft, and put out to sea.

The time-bubble extended six feet from the tank in every direction, carving a shallow liquid dish in the frozen water. Pulling lightly with his oar, Donny sent the boat skittering wildly across the surface of the water, like a bead of mercury on a wrinkled sheet of plastic.

He rowed south into the gulf. As he passed near two bronzed surfers locked in a freeze-frame race for shore, he pumped his fist in the air and shouted, "Have fun in the shallow end, kids!"

The shore dwindled and the mountains shrank, hiding the sun in the east. It wasn't long before Donny recognized his strategic error. He consulted his charts and bent his course south by southwest toward Santa Barbara Island. Forty miles later he beached himself and closed the stopcock. The world unfroze and a universe of almost unbearable sound crashed in. The chilly salt wind ruffled his clothing and hair, and, suddenly exhausted, Donny threw himself down on the narrow white sand verge like a weary castaway. Rocky, thickly forested hills rose abruptly from the beach in jagged, serried ranks. The wind prowled restively through the trees.

By the end of the day Donny had already read two of the mystery novels he'd packed to help pass the long journey. The western sky was stained in vivid reds and oranges, the sun a fiery disk half-sunk in the ocean. Now he could continue, sailing into daylight rather than twilight.

In the days that followed, Donny kept to the paths of least resistance across the rumpled ocean surface. It was easier to follow the channels between waves than to cut over them crosswise, and the channels were smoothest along the paths of the great ocean currents. So he first swept south along the California Current, then arced west with the North Equatorial Current. But near Palmyra Island he found his course bending in a *U* as the Equatorial Counter Current sent him shooting back in the direction he'd come. It took hard stroking south over waves like sand dunes to change course, but eventually Donny was able to gain the South Equatorial Current and continue west. To conserve his supplies, he speared the occasional bluefin tuna, though the cleaning was at first nearly more than he could stomach.

He stopped at Christmas Island to gather coconuts for the second half of his crossing, but soon became intrigued by a group of native islanders standing like a long line of statues in the shallow coral lagoon where he had beached. They faced inland, nets of woven palm fronds stretched between them. Curious despite his hurry, Donny sat down on the beach and turned off his time-bubble. The islanders jerked into motion, herding fish toward the shore, but sudden fright registered on their faces and they stopped, babbling to one another and pointing to shore. Donny realized what a shock his sudden appearance must have been. He stood up and walked slowly into the lagoon with his palms open, speaking words of reassurance. Soon he was helping them man the nets.

He made his way through the silent forest after the manner of the tree kangaroos, without ever touching the ground.

They feasted together that afternoon on coconuts, broiled fish, and tropical fruit. Men and women daubed their faces with bright pigments and danced a euphoric dance as the sun descended in the west. The entire village turned out for the festivities. Fiddling with the glass tank for the amusement of the natives, Donny discovered he could bleed off small, self-contained bubbles that would suspend and preserve whatever they contained. Nimble-fingered children followed him out to the lagoon and helped him catch small, brightly colored fish which he froze in time and gave away as baubles. The chief of the village presented him with a carved bone necklace as a token of honor. Donny had no time to offer thanks, however, for just then a party of the occupying Britons pulled up in a dun-colored jeep, no doubt drawn by the drums and the chanting. Not wanting to explain his presence, Donny donned the necklace, opened the stopcock, and sailed into the arrested sunset.

Thereafter, it didn't take much to distract him. He was ceremoniously regaled on Phoenix and Ellice Islands and in various parts

of the New Hebrides (though one group of frightened natives nearly speared him in their panic when he materialized in front of them). His collection of exotic trinkets and preserved fish increased, though the duffel never once grew heavy or bulky. In the Solomon Islands, a local chieftain offered Donny his choice of any three of his two dozen daughters as wives. When Donny refused, the chieftain with grave respect declared him a holy man and tutored him for three weeks in the mystic high arts of the warrior-priest.

Sailing to New Guinea, Donny accidentally fell overboard and discovered a new property of bottled time. Pressurized air was trapped with him in the time-bubble, and he found he could descend to any depth he wished by adjusting the flow at the stopcock. Delighted, Donny descended so far into the Bougainville Trench that not even sunlight could penetrate. There he captured remarkable and monstrously ugly sea devils, anglerfish and other strange creatures, many of which could generate their own light. Back at the surface, he accidentally freed one anglerfish from its protective bubble, and the pressure differential promptly turned it inside out.

He sailed the Huon Gulf and landed on the eastern shore of New Guinea, north of Salamaua. After stowing his deflated boat, he trekked northeast through the thick rain forests of the Bismarck Range. In the foothills he lived on the fruit of the sago palm and reentered normal time to admire the haunting cries of the island's birds of paradise. Climbing to the highland valleys, he slept in tough spear grass and took an occasional meal with Melanesian-speaking villagers. For a time he made his way through the silent forest after the manner of the tree kangaroos, without ever touching the ground. Leaving the forest, he forded the Mamberamo River at its widest point and made his way along the ragged shoreline of Geelvink-baai before striking out overland to Fakfak.

From there he hopped islands, skipping across the waves from Seram to Buru to Celebes to Borneo. In Bandjermasin on Borneo's southern coast, he walked the Eighty-eight Steps of Enlightenment, then sailed across the Java Sea to Djakarta. After a brief sojourn with the Tjirebon monks, whose knowledge of animal lore was surpassed only by their asceticism, he crossed the Sunda Selat to Telukbetung on Sumatra. After there braving the mist shrouded lowland swamps, it was across the Strait of Malacca to Singapore, where he took a day to sample the arcane delights of that great city. Next he journeyed north along the Gulf of Siam. Near Bangkok he sat for three days without food or water, contemplating the great golden Buddha at the heart of the Maze of the Soul, a natural labyrinth formed entirely from bamboo and lianas.

After a brief period of recuperation, he followed the course of the Mae Nam Chao Phraya north to Tak, where he turned west to brave the terrors of the Dawna Mountains. Piercing the dark forest to its heart, Donny encountered the beautiful People of the Mist, who by mystical means helped him cross the unbreachable Salween River Gorge at its giddiest height. From there he continued west to the Irrawaddy and Chindwin Rivers of Burma, which were swollen with frozen floodwaters. He was tempted to ride the waterways south to Rangoon and the Mouths of the Irrawaddy, but instead turned northeast to cross the Khasi Hills into the Assam Valley, a land thick with delicate grass jewel butterflies. On the road to Bhutan he survived on what hares, thrushes, and pheasants he could coax into his traps, for he had abandoned his practice of slaughtering defenseless frozen animals. He once snared a mountain quail, but released it when he recalled that 1876 had been the last sighting of the species. He spent long hours riding the Asiatic elephant and the Bengal tiger, and playing tag with the Malayan sun bear. Then he ascended the lower reaches of the Himalayas.

His path took him through Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, and Tibet. From the wise men of Katmandu he learned to read the languages of rock, ice, and snow, to climb walls with his bare hands, and to ride the avalanche. He camped on the flanks of Everest and Kanchenjunga, and he tracked the yeti from the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra all the way to the headwaters of the Indus. He followed that river into Pakistan as far as Peshawar, then stole through the Khyber Pass into Afghanistan. He trekked northwest through that war-ravaged land, and one morning breakfasted with an insane Russian soldier who lived in a cave decorated with murals from the life of Trotsky. He crossed into Turkmenistan and entered the great desert of Peski Karakumy, where he confronted horrifying childhood nightmares and only survived by learning to distinguish the true visions from the false. At length he reached Krasnovodsk and set sail into the Caspian Sea.

After a brief detour to the south, where he climbed Damavand in Iran and then tried to see how quickly he could descend from its 18,000-foot summit to the shore of the Caspian Sea (92 feet below sea level), he sailed to the port city of Baku in Azerbaydzhan. There he lingered to foment a workers' revolt before hurrying to Armenia to help the people rebuild from a massive earthquake. In the hills near Mount Ararat, after a fruitless search for Noah's Ark, he attached himself to a loose-knit division of Kurdish rebels and battled the Turks for an entire glorious week filled with adventure and camaraderie. From there he turned south, riding the Tigris to the ruins of Nineveh and beyond, then cutting over to the remains of Babylon near the Euphrates. There he poured a libation to the ancient gods (just in case) and unearthed a cleverly secreted stela which bore as its inscription the Seven Keys to Universal Disharmony. Once he had committed that information to memory, he carefully chiseled the stone into illegibility and reburied it.

A relatively uneventful trip due west across the Syrian Desert brought him to the splendor of Damascus, where he made obeisance in the Great Mosque at the Shrine of John the Baptist's Head. From there it was easy travel to Beirut. On that city's rubble-strewn beaches he encountered the Specter of War, a gore-spattered apparition stumbling drunkenly across the sand with a bag of body parts slung over its shoulder. Hurrying on, he followed the Mediterranean coastline past Haifa to Tel Aviv, then turned inland once more. The clean air scoured away lingering unpleasantnesses, and he realized with some surprise that he had nearly reached his destination, Jerusalem.

He checked his gauges. Of the five-year timestore he'd started with, less than a year remained. Off and on he had attempted, with mixed success, to derive a set of equations that would describe the counterintuitive behavior of time-bubbles—why objects on the opposite side of the dividing surface always appeared motionless to an observer, whether within or without the bubble. He suspected a relativistic effect, but lacked the requisite math to complete his calculations. Still, he had reached a rough approximation of time expenditure as a function of bubble radius, and figuring that a third of what he'd used had gone to preserving his specimens, he'd still spent more than two and half years outside the normal flow of time. Add to that the 18 months he'd spent in normal time, and more than five years had passed for him since the beginning of his journey.

Donny sat down on a rock and stared in wonder at the surrounding Judaean hills. It was spring, and the grass that spread over the stony ground was a vivid and inviting green. Motionless birds filled the sky like random flecks of pepper. Five entire years had gone by, five years of his life—but even so, he didn't want the adventure to end. Were Jerusalem not such a powerful attraction, he could have kept going without a second thought. He had never been so happy as in his travels. Could he give that up now? Did he want the adventure to end? He forced himself to consider the reasons he had traveled the way he had, when he could have used the bottled time to stow away on a plane or a ship. Had he needed to prove himself worthy of Grace's attentions, or was she just a convenient excuse for the whole enterprise?

The slightest of tremors in his hands told him the answer. He didn't know if Grace would still be in Jerusalem, and he was afraid he wouldn't find her. Well, she either was or she wasn't, and if she wasn't, he would pick up the trail and continue. If she was—well, what awaited him in the City of David wouldn't be an end but a continuation, another beginning, the start of the grandest adventure of all.

Donny leapt to his feet and started walking.

Soon Jerusalem spread before him, bright and gleaming. The city was clean and alive and white, a fortress of sculpted snow miraculously preserved in the summer sun. The illusion held even as he pressed through the silent, frozen crowds thronging the streets. This was a faerie land, a realm of magic, a place of infinite wonder, and with instincts honed by five years of training, Donny forged an unerring path through it. After countless twists and crooks, he passed through the Gate of the Chain and into the Haram ash-Sharif, the sacred Temple area of the Old City. He sensed that his goal was almost upon him.

And there, on the outskirts of a crowd at the Wailing Wall, he found her.

She had cropped her hair short, and her skin had turned a deep, deep brown, but after all that time he still knew her in an instant. She was even more beautiful than he remembered. Frozen in the covert act of photographing supplicants at the Wall, the young woman possessed a leonine grace that seemed fluid even in motionlessness. The camera was raised surreptitiously to her eye, her finger just flexing on the shutter release.

Looking at her, Donny felt as giddy as he had the first time she had sat down next to him in their world cinema class. The difference was, this time he thought he knew what to do with the feeling.

He stepped in front of the lens, smiled mischievously, and shut the tank's stopcock.

At once the shutter snapped and the noise of the city crashed upon him in a huge wave. She angrily lowered the camera but broke off her imprecation before the words came out. Recognition lit her eyes like a flaring match. "Donny Chavez," she said, almost inaudibly.

"Grace, hello," he said in a voice thick with overtone. Natives and tourists coursed around them in equal parts, the din of the crowd was fantastic. In Bangkok Donny had learned to speak simultaneously on four distinct emotional levels, but with all the noise it was hard to do right. "It's been a long time."

She took a step back and looked him up and down. He was suddenly conscious of how much he must have changed. Could she read the imprint of wonders, battles, and far horizons on his features, or did she see only a once-familiar face framed by dark stubble and flowing, sun-bleached hair?

"I was wondering if you were ever going to write to me again," she said at last. "You look older."

"So do you. Like I said, it's been a long time."

She shook her head. "No, I look older, but you look older than you should. Almost as if—" A pained expression crossed her face, but then she laughed. The sound of it splashed down his nerves like cold, clear water. "Would you listen to me? That must have sounded rude."

"No, not at all."

He felt the moment would never end, as if they were preserved now as specimens, preserved in the evening's rich amber.

She tilted her head. "So what brings you to Jerusalem?"

Donny squinted into the sun. He smelled dust and frying food. He thought he could smell her sweat. "I was just in the neighborhood, figured I'd look you up. I'm new here. I thought you might know a good tour guide."

She smiled, shaking her head. "Donny Chavez," she said in wonder. "You know, I might at that."

Grace spent the rest of the day showing him the city. They visited the Crusader Church of Saint Anne at the Pool of Bethesda, where some of Christ's great miracles were wrought. They explored the Syrian convent of Saint Mark, and they wandered aimlessly through crowded markets and bazaars. They climbed a stairway of stone to the top of Mount Zion, where they saw David's tomb and visited the traditional site of the Last Supper. They raced to the bottom of the hill, and Grace won because she cut down the slope instead of taking the stairs.

Turning away from the magnificent Damascus Gate, their idyll was interrupted by the sight of Israeli soldiers beating a Palestinian youth. Donny took an automatic step toward the fray, but Grace held him back. "There's nothing you can do," she said. "You'll just get hurt." She was wrong, but Donny nodded and turned away. He noted the unshed tears in her eyes, and a strange feeling gnawed inside his chest.

The sun was sinking in the west. Under that burnished golden sky, the city might have been built from angel-food cake. "Let's hurry," said Grace. "There's something you have to see before it gets too late."

Together they wound through the dusky streets at a half-run. After several minutes they came to the Church of Dominus Flevit, and as they pushed through the heavy front entrance the ringing chant of the muezzins echoed throughout the city, calling the Muslim faithful to prayer. The church was dark inside, but bright dustmotes danced in the beams of orange light that streamed through a leaded-glass window behind the altar at the far end of the nave. Grace started down the aisle. A priest lighting candles for mass looked up in disapproval, and Donny stopped.

"Come on," she said impatiently. "The sun'll be down in a few minutes."

But Donny knelt and set down his duffel. He had stowed the tank inside, and now he reached in the bag and opened the stopcock. The distant cries outside abruptly cut off. He stood, holding the bag. "Stay close," he said to Grace, "and we'll have all the time we need."

She led him down the aisle to the transept behind the altar. "There," she said, and from the window in the apse they could see the Old City in its entirety, glinting like a maze of stacked sugar cubes. At the center of it all stood the Dome of the Rock. It blazed in triumphant gold, a second sun in the sunset. "That's the place where Mohammed ascended to heaven," she said. "And it's where the Temple of Solomon once stood."

"It's beautiful," said Donny. He looked at her. "Everything's beautiful from here."

She leaned her head on her fist and smiled wistfully out the window. "Sometimes it looks so unreal here I think I'm dreaming, like

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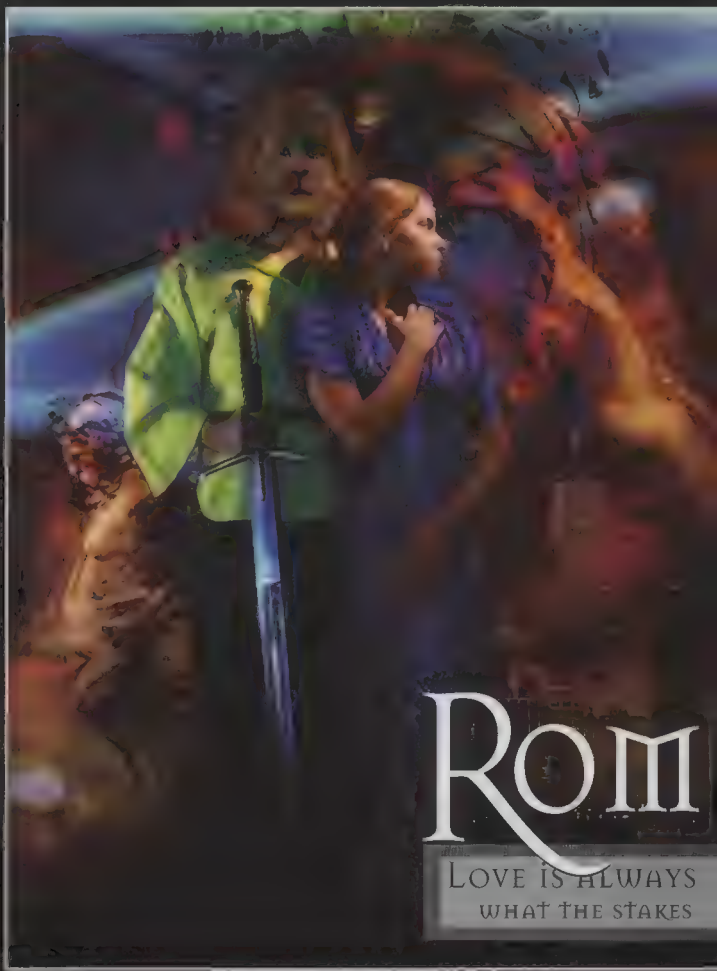

ROM
LOVE IS ALWAYS
WHAT THE STAKES

ANTICORE

By Tim Pratt • Illustration by Scott Grimando

DANGEROUS, BUT SOMETIMES WE DON'T KNOW ARE UNTIL WE'RE IN TOO DEEP TO GET OUT.

So she starts sleeping with my best friend, and they don't tell me about it, because they think I'll be mad. Jesus. I would've been *happy* to hear she was screwing Nick. At least I *like* him, he's a definite cut above the usual buzz-cut muscle-shirt troglodytes she hooks up with. God knows why those guys want to sleep with her, when the closest she's ever come to a gym is standing outside of one smoking a cigarette while waiting for a bus. But Nick and Susie thought I'd fly into a rage, that they'd be stepping on some weird territorial taboo, so they snuck around behind my back until one day I came home early because the coffee shop where I usually work was being fumigated, and I found them in my bed. And at first I was like "Whoops, guys, I'll go grab a bagel and come back in a little bit," but they totally freaked out and then it was true confession time. They'd been doing this for two months now, every chance they get, and they're so sorry and the secrecy is driving them crazy. Oh, and we're like totally in love, Susie says, and we're gonna make a go of it; and I'm moving in with Nick; and we're gonna be monogamous, because this open relationship thing is just too stressful, and we're really sorry, Ray.

I don't know if they had safe sex or not, but it's not like I've never been in bed with Nick (I've been in like ten threesomes and one out-and-out orgy with the guy, we go way back) so it doesn't worry me too much.

After they said their piece I told them to fuck off, and they had enough respect for me to do so with a minimum of fuss, and I'd

> That glimpse of blackness was just the bad light, I figured, or her face reflecting on a dirty part of the mirror, or just me being drunk.

minutes later I was sitting in my little apartment over the scary convenience store, smoking a cigarette and ashing into a beer can, wondering what happened. That morning I had a girlfriend, admittedly one who sulked a lot and borrowed money all the time, but still, a girlfriend, and I had a best friend to shoot pool and walk around downtown with and pick up chicks with, and now maybe I didn't have either one. So I put on some bitter emo-indie-punk music—Agent Ink, this band from down South somewhere, I think it was—and lay back on my futon staring at the ceiling with its totally appropriate nasty waterspots. Hello, squalor, my old friend.

I took a nap. Didn't get any work done, but none of my deadlines were exactly looming. I'm a writer, and I actually make a living that way (if you call this living, ha ha), with a lot of hustle. I do music reviews for one of the local papers, and anything else I can scrounge up, textbook articles, advertising copy, the occasional feature article. I fill in with proofreading and when things get really rough I work the door at a club a friend of mine owns, or run sound or lights somewhere. It's a pretty hand-to-mouth living, but I went to college on a scholarship and I've never even had a credit card, so I don't have the sort of debt most of my friends do. Don't own a car. I ghost along.

So that night I mostly moped and slept, tried to decide if I'd really miss Susie, knowing I'd really miss Nick, because he's the kind of guy who wouldn't be cool with hanging out with me after this. Slept badly, but slept. The next day I went to the coffee shop (which still smelled like bug spray) with my laptop and snagged a table in the one corner that the sun never hits all day long, and I drank cup after cup of black coffee and typed my fingers to the bone, like I do most every day. An article about the discovery of radium for a high school science book. Another about the Battle of the Thames for a different book. Proofreading some boring-ass article about mixing boards for a music magazine. All of it good for keeping me from thinking about Susie and Nick, from wondering what they were doing that morning, probably having sex at Nick's place, which wouldn't bother me except I'll never be in bed with either of them again.

After work I went home, plugged in the laptop, and sent off the work I did to the interested parties. With luck, checks would appear in my mailbox soon. Writing can be a bitch like that, the checks come whenever, usually about two days after you absolutely, positively *must* have the money. When I think about how much my rent costs, I automatically tack on the extra $25 I get charged for paying late, since I can't remember the last time I managed to pay it on time. Then I puttered around online a little, looking for writing jobs, didn't find anything, looked at some porn, didn't get turned on, checked my e-mail, didn't have anything interesting. I decided to go out and get drunk because I've just been jilted by my girl for my best friend, and damn, that's a reason to get drunk, innit?

I went to Black Glass, which is dim and smoky and has Bikini Kill and Sparklehorse on the jukebox and live music lots of nights. I sat at one of the discus-sized tables and ordered a pint of Guinness, because I hadn't had dinner, and I'd heard you could live off Guinness if you didn't mind getting scurvy in the process. I figured I'd soften myself up with a few pints, then start ordering high-test vodka to finish myself off. I could stagger home from Black Glass no matter how drunk I got; it was only three and a half blocks.

Halfway through my second pint, with Neutral Milk Hotel wailing on the jukebox, a bunch of college kids came in, dressed in full faux-punk regalia, clothes bought from expensive stores in the mall, meant to look like clothes scrounged out of the bin at the Salvation Army. They took the table next to mine and started babbling and braying and drowning out the music, bumping into my chair, generally being shits—and this was *before* they'd even started drinking. I gave them as baleful a stare as I could manage, glaring hard enough you'd think they'd turn to stone, but they didn't even notice me. So I slumped, defeated, and picked up my glass and relocated to the bar, where there were three empty stools. I sat in the middle one and felt pleasantly insulated from the cruel world. I drained my beer and looked at the smudged-up mirror behind the bar. (No, I'm not gonna take this staring-in-the-mirror-moment opportunity to describe my face. It's just an ordinary guy's face.)

I looked in the mirror and saw *her*, down at the other end of the bar. Ash-blonde, probably in her late thirties but looking good, a face that was both pretty and *comfortable*, if you know what I mean; she wasn't caked-up with makeup or hiding behind her hair or anything, just a nice pleasant face, looked like somebody you could talk to, and maybe more than talk to. She had her eyes closed, but not like she was sleeping, like she was listening. Her dress was loose and black, satiny-reflective. I must've been looking at her for two minutes at least before she opened her eyes, not blinking sleepily but *snap*, right open, and she looked straight at me, my face in the mirror, my eyes.

Her eyes were as black and reflective as her dress, a solid dark gleam, without white or iris.

I jumped or something, I think. She glanced down, sort of secretly smiling at her drink, then looked back up at me, kind of coyly, but

not in a bullshit way. I don't think I'd ever met a girl before who could look coy without also looking manipulative. Her eyes weren't black anymore, just normal eyes, though I couldn't tell what color in the dimness. That glimpse of blackness was just the bad light, I figured, or her face reflecting on a dirty part of the mirror, or just me being drunk. I didn't think about her black eyes again until much, much later.

We kept looking at each other in the mirror, her sort of smiling, me—I don't know what. Thinking she looked even better with her eyes open, probably. I wanted to go over and talk to her, sure, but more than that I wanted *her* to come talk to *me*. Then there'd be no chance that I was misinterpreting her look; I mean, maybe she wasn't looking at me at all. Hard to tell what's what, in a mirror.

Then she gave me a bigger smile, shrugged a little, put some money on the bar, and stood up, pulling her purse strap over her shoulder.

I looked down into my beer. Just a swallow left. I could stay here and get bombed out of my skull, to make a match for my bombed-out heart ... or I could do something else.

I was just drunk enough to do something else. If I hadn't ... but hell. That's an idiot's game, playing what-might've-been. You always lose that game. So I'll just tell you what *was*.

I followed her. She went out the door, and I came after her and said, "Hey."

She stopped by the curb and looked at me. "Hey yourself," she said, and her voice was sibilant, smoky, a voice you could listen to for hours, a voice that would go down like good whiskey goes down, smooth and warm.

I held out my hand. "I'm Ray."

She shook my hand, briefly. "Lily."

And then we were looking at each other again, just like before, and I had no idea what to say, still, so I said, "Um, I wondered, I wanted to buy you a drink, but you left, so ..." I shrugged. "What can I do instead?"

"Do you like jazz?"

"That depends. New Orleans, Traditional, Bop, Chicago style, Dixieland, ragtime, fusion...? I don't get into fusion much."

She cocked her head. I had the feeling I'd passed a test. "Pretty traditional. Five piece. Sax, drums, clarinet, trumpet, and upright bass. Called the Blue Rock Quintet. They're playing at a little place downtown, the Spiral Down Club."

I waited for her to go on, but she didn't. "Is that an invitation?" I said.

"It's information. That's where I'm going, though."

I smiled. "Want to share a cab?"

Before two hours were gone, I knew I was in it again, that I wanted to know this woman. The Blue Rock Quintet was an all-female jazz group, a pretty rare thing, and they were good, really well balanced, though the sax player was the best of them, a tall woman with short black hair, wearing a tux with tails. She was hot, and the music she played made her even hotter, but there was no one but Lily for me then, it was all about the way she lost herself in the music, the way she looked at me, the way she leaned in close to talk between songs.

Was Lily just a rebound? Shit, in my vocabulary, the only thing "rebound" means is the bounce off a backboard in basketball. I've been going from woman to woman my whole life; it's less a rebound and more like a skipped stone, or chain smoking. Lily was there, and she was it, and she made me wonder why I'd spent so much time with Susie, that bundle of eye makeup and neuroses, when there was someone like Lily, so comfortable in her skin, making me so comfortable, too.

The Spiral Down was tiny, the tables right up against the stage, but the effect was cozy rather than claustrophobic. After listening to two sets, Lily leaned in close to my ear and said, "Let's go someplace we can talk." I nodded and followed her out. We walked down the block, chatting about the music, until we got to a mostly deserted café, nobody inside but a guy with a shaved head scribbling furiously in a black notebook and a yuppie wearing headphones working at a laptop. We ordered drinks (she got coffee, just coffee, and I did likewise; a match made in heaven) and sat down in a corner, beneath a dangling mobile, crescents of steel, only shiny on the edges, hanging on wires.

"So," she said, looking at me appraisingly, half a smile hanging around her lips.

"So?" My left foot was tapping on the floor, seemingly of its own volition, and with an effort I stopped it. I felt jittery, really keyed up, and wondered if ordering coffee was such a good idea.

"Having fun?"

"Hell, yes. I didn't expect to have fun tonight."

She nodded. "Think you'll keep having fun if you keep seeing me?"

I tried to keep my big goofy grin under wraps, and only partly succeeded. "The current evidence seems to suggest that I will."

"Me, too. I'd like to go out with you again."

"I'm pretty sure I can free up my schedule."

She leaned forward, close to me, and for the first time I saw the little lines around her eyes, and the word that came to mind was *careworn*. I thought her face was beautiful, just touched by laugh lines, crying lines, life lines. "But there's something you should know. My relationship situation is a little unusual."

How many times had I started this conversation, mostly with girls who were maybe sophomores in college, explaining to them that I hadn't been in a monogamous relationship since I was 17, and had no intention of every going back to the Land of Jealous Possession? I wondered if she was one of those hardcore polyamorous types, and if she'd start in about her co-primaries and her nested secondaries in an N-structure, and how we could at best have a tertiary relationship with bimonthly sex privileges. The jargon can get pretty extreme, though I don't have much use for it myself, preferring to say "Yeah, we're friends, and we sleep together sometimes," rather than "I'm her tertiary with secondary tendencies" or some shit like that.

But Lily didn't get into any of that. She said, "I have a boyfriend, named Martin, and we've been together for over 10 years. He's a musician, though, and he spends about six months a year traveling, playing with different groups. I went with him a couple of times, and it was fun, roaming all over Europe—he gets a lot of gigs in Europe—but it's not the kind of life I'm built for. I'm too much of a homebody. So for the past eight years or so we've had a different arrangement. While he's here in town, for four months, six months, whatever, we're together, and it's great. And when he leaves, I see whoever I want, until he gets back." She shrugged. "It works pretty well. I don't get bothered about the women he sleeps with on the road, and he doesn't get bothered about the people I see when he's gone."

I mulled that over. "So he's on the road now?"

"Yep. In Greece, last I heard."

"When's he going to be back?"

"It's a little uncertain, but probably in October."

It was early May. Five months sounded like . . . forever. How many dates had I been on that turned into relationships that lasted longer than five months, anyway? Not many. And I knew about this Martin guy, so I could keep that in my head, not get too attached even if things did go well with Lily. "Sounds good to me," I said.

"And even if you and I really hit it off, that doesn't mean I won't see other—"

I held up my hand. "Say no more. It's cool." And I told her about Susie and Nick and the brief history of my love life, and we knew we understood each other.

That night was the beginning of something beautiful In the short term, anyway. In the longer term, it was just a small part of something pretty monstrous

The next five months were great I could go on about it, tell you in detail about my summer of love with Lily. She was a freelance graphic designer, so her schedule was nearly as flexible as mine (though she got more work, and made more money, than I did). We did all-night film festivals, where we'd each pick out two movies and watch them on the DVD at her place. So she saw *The Brood* and *It Came from Outer Space* and *The Masque of the Red Death* for the first time, and I saw *The Lady Eve* and *Sullivan's Travels* and *Queen of the Nile* We had picnics in the park, fried chicken and big roast beef sandwiches—I've never known a more joyfully carnivorous woman—and went roller-skating, which I hadn't done since junior high We took a couple of weekend trips (her treat) to the country, which we spent in bed and on hiking trails in roughly equal proportion And we went to dozens and dozens of shows, plays, concerts, and poetry slams, and at every one she seemed to know a performer, or the guy working the door, or the woman working the lights, and half the time she got us in free, which is pretty much the epitome of cool in my book She was so good for me, too I mean, you know guys like me; I wear black, I smoke too much, I like obscure music, I talk shit, I'm the master of irony and sarcasm, I sleep all day and stay up all night, I'm cooler-than-thou, it's been my thing for years But with Lily, I loosened up, laughed more, and the world didn't seem so painfully tedious and tawdry and stupid anymore I was, to be as cliché as possible, stopping to smell the roses, and they smelled good

And we had lots and lots of sex, occasionally great sex, but almost always really *good* sex. She was funny, and sweet, and she would sometimes have whole conversations with me in her sleep, her end of things matter-of-fact and surreal: "Have you seen my eyepatch?" she'd say, and lying awake I'd reply, "No, babe." And she'd say, "The statues are breaking in the rain" and I'd say, "That's what happens when you use cheap cement" and so forth She never remembered those conversations the next morning, though she said she believed me; she'd always had the habit, she said, of narrating her dreams.

Neither of us dated anyone else, though we left the option open, we were together more nights than not, unless one of us had a deadline to meet. It was something Something else. Something special

I can't decide if all this is boring or not, if you care about the good times, or if you're just waiting for the monsters to start jumping out of the closet, if you're waiting for the train wreck you know is coming. I guess it doesn't matter. It's hard for me, writing about those good months, remembering. The thing is: she loved me. I wasn't just somebody to fuck while Martin was away, though maybe that's what she expected me to be at first We had something more. It was the best relationship I'd ever been in, the most honest, the most unselfconscious, the most gentle, and it was good for her, too, she told me so often enough So I thought that when Martin got back there'd be *room* for me, that we could still see each other, that it wouldn't be the end, because I was *special.*

So in late September, when she said, "We should talk," I got this heavy feeling in my gut, like I'd just eaten a pound of ball bearings

But before I tell you about that, I should maybe tell you about the lion dreams

I've never really been into animals I live in a city, and I don't see anything other than birds and squirrels, cats, dogs on leashes I've been to the zoo a couple of times, but the monkeys interested me the most, probably because they're the closest thing to people I hardly paid attention to the lions at all. But after I started seeing Lily regularly, I began dreaming about lions all the time, dreaming I *was* a lion, a big cat, slinking through the long grasses on the savanna, chasing down antelope, lazing in the sun, climbing over rocks I loved the sun on my fur, the strength in my legs, the way dead animals smelled as good as hot brownies or espresso I had that dream two, three times a week I read about lions, even wrote an article about them, mostly about how badass they are, that I sold to a kid's magazine. Most of the dreams were set in the savanna, or in a rocky place, but there were other settings, too. The one I remember most clearly was an island, with a weird building like a Greek temple up on a hill. The beaches were white sand, and the water was as blue as the lips of an asphyxiation victim. There were gray stone statues standing in the sand in front of the building, like it was the most white-trash front yard in the history of the world Statues of people, birds, and all kinds of weird creatures from mythology Roosters with lizard tails and multifaceted eyes. A pegasus with one wing broken off. A hydra, tipped over, with half its heads buried in the sand. A griffin, a centaur, a unicorn, and a cyclops—*that* one was as tall as a building itself I padded through the statues, toward the building, but then I heard this *hissing,* like the air being let out of a hundred tires at once, coming from the dark behind the pillars. I looked around and saw some lion statues, their faces frozen in snarls I slunk back to the water, which churned and seemed filled with monsters, and I was trapped, and desperate, and also *sad.* I woke from that dream with a sense of choking despair, and I clung to Lily like she was the only thing keeping me from sinking

That was the last night I spent with Lily. The next morning she said, "We should talk," and here we are again

We were in her white-and-yellow kitchen, having breakfast I was having toast and coffee because my stomach doesn't appreciate much more early in the morning, but she had bacon and eggs and chicken-apple sausage, and a big glass of milk. Lily ate neatly, without shoveling, but she could make mountains of food disappear

"I thought we *were* talking?" I said, trying to keep it light.

She sighed "I should've said something earlier, but things've been so good I heard from Martin a few days ago. He's going to be back next week Monday I'm picking him up from the airport."

"Oh," I said. "Well, cool. I know you'll be glad to see him." Lily didn't talk about Martin much, though he naturally showed up in lots of her stories and anecdotes. The impression I got was that he was talented, moody, and capricious, the sort of guy who's a lot of fun to hang out with, but maybe a little exhausting, who decides to go to Vegas on a whim and convinces you to go with him, or who jumps in the car to go to the coast for a week and sleeps on the beach when he gets there. He played lots of instruments, but his best were trumpet and flute, and he'd played with just about every jazz and swing band on the planet at one time or another He did well enough to tour like hell for several months and then take a few months off.

Lily nodded. "I've missed him, yeah. But what I really want to say is ... I'm going to miss you. These past few months have been fabulous."

I put my coffee cup down; my hand was shaking. "Are you breaking up with me?"

She looked annoyed. Lily had precious little patience for bullshit, and I realized that's how I sounded to her. For a second her eyes looked black, just like they had in the mirror that first night in Black Glass. I'd seen that before, when she got angry, which wasn't often, just a flash of black, and then back to green. I'd convinced myself it was a little consistent hallucination on my part, that I sensed her mood and translated it into a creepy visual effect. "Ray, you knew all along there was a limit on the far side of this, that once Martin came back I was going to be with him again I

never lied to you."

"You haven't exactly brought it up lately," I said, bitter, not trying to hold back.

"I didn't think you needed to be reminded every half an hour, no. Was I mistaken?"

"So this is it, then? I'm out the door? You can't even see me on weekends, or—"

"No. I'm sorry. When Martin's here, he's for me, and I'm for him. He ... it's an out of sight, out of mind thing for him. He doesn't care what I do when he's not around, but when he's back, he wants me all to himself." She shrugged. "That's the way it's always been."

"It doesn't have to be that way, if you don't want it to be."

She looked at me, totally cool—she might have been something carved from stone—and said "No, it doesn't. If I don't want it to be."

And that was all I knew how it was, then. She didn't want to be with me.

Though I hated myself for it, I said, "Don't you love me, Lily?"

She softened and put her hand over mine. "Sweet Ray. Yes, I love you. But that's not what this is about. I love Martin, too, and I have for a long time. You've been my summertime, but Martin is my man for every season."

I nodded miserably. "When he goes away again—"

"Maybe," she said, but she wouldn't look me in the eyes. "It's hard to say. People change. I don't know how long he'll be here. He's even talked about returning, these past couple of years, though I can't imagine him staying in one place for so long." She finally met my eyes. "I'll call you." I knew she meant it. I also knew she might not call for months. "I'm not asking you to wait for me. You know I'm not the one-and-only woman for you. We know that's just a bunch of dumb Hollywood crap."

"Yeah," I said hollowly, but for the first time I realized that the movies she liked most were those old romantic comedies, the ones where there really is just one person meant for you, one true love in a world of wrong choices. And I think that's a dangerous bull shit idea, I always have, and Lily said she did, too ... but I wondered. I wondered if she didn't see Martin as her one and only, and everyone else as mere recreation.

"Take care," she said.

I mumbled something, pushed back from the table, got my stuff, and went to the door. She didn't follow. She didn't kiss me good bye. I couldn't decide if that was cruelty or a kindness.

I got home and found an invitation to Nick and Susie's wedding. I pitched it in the trash. I'd been thinking about calling Nick, trying to convince him there were no hard feelings (and there really weren't; losing Susie was how I met Lily, and I wouldn't have traded that for anything), seeing if we could talk, but there was no way I could do that now. Too bitter. Why the hell should that idiot and that bitch be getting married, when I'd just been given the boot in favor of Martin?

So I'd suffer in silence, noble and alone, or maybe get drunk, finish the bender that Lily had interrupted all those months ago.

I didn't actually do that, though. I got into my work as much as possible instead, editing a long software manual that had been translated incompetently from the Japanese, writing an article about the early American oil barons, researching world death rituals for an anthropology professor at one of the universities. Filling my brain with more useless bullshit, and crowding out all the bad thoughts about Lily and Martin, Martin, motherfucking Martin. It was a struggle every day not to call her, and finally, in desperation, I got involved with a woman who lived in my building. Her name was Marie, and she was a waitress/actress, dumb as a thumbscrew and attracted to my old misanthropic-ironic pose, which I'd donned like a suit of armor when Lily gave me the boot. We went to clubs, drank too much, and screwed. Such was life; familiar, empty, simple.

And then one day I was sitting at the coffee shop, reading one of the local papers, getting pissed off because they'd put a typo in the byline of my latest music review, so now my name was "Roy," when I saw his name, that fucker's name, that bastard's name: Martin Chorus.

("His name's Martin *Chorus*?" I said, laughing. "He's a musician and his last name is *Chorus*?"

("It was 'Khora' originally," she said, and spelled it for me. "A very old Persian name. But when Martin's ancestors came to America, the immigration officials spelled it 'Chorus,' so that's what it's been ever since. Just a funny coincidence, that he's a musician." That was one of our few conversations about Martin.)

Martin was playing at a little jazz bar on Saturday, which was that night, at 8 o'clock. I looked at my watch. Four hours. Shit. There was no question. I had to at least get a *look* at this guy. And if Lily was there ... I'd just tell her it was a coincidence, or I was covering it for a review, or something. I called Marie on my cell phone and canceled our date. She wasn't even that pissed. Marie was easy-going, and not bad in bed, but about as deep as a saucer. No comparison to Lily.

So I got dressed and went to the bar, a place called The Stone Mirror, and took a table a bit back from the stage. It was a little

> "There is a monster," the old lion said—or gave me to understand; it didn't use words. "An old monster. You must kill it."

before eight, and the place was filling up, but it was Saturday night, so that didn't mean Martin was any good; *every* place was full on Saturdays. I looked around for Lily, but she was nowhere to be seen, which didn't surprise me. She'd seen Martin play a million times, probably, and loving supportiveness only goes so far.

The band came on without introduction, setting up their instruments. A drummer, an upright bass player, a guitarist, a keyboardist, a trombonist, and Martin, a trumpet case in one hand, a flute case in the other.

I'd never seen pictures of him—which was weird, when you think about it, it seems like Lily would've had a couple around—but the instrument cases gave him away.

I hated him at first sight. I wanted to eat his fucking eyes out of his head. I'd never had such a visceral reaction to someone before. It made sense; he'd stolen Lily from me, sort of, but still, my reaction felt extreme even from the inside. Martin had olive skin and curly black hair, and he wasn't all that good looking, really: his face was too round, almost babyish, and the resting position for his expression was a kind of nasty smirk. He wore a dark suit with kitschy, wide lapels, and when he introduced the band members, his voice was nothing special, kind of deep.

I watched him through the whole set, and he was good, the bastard. He played trumpet and flute both, wringing out music violently

one minute, playing soft and gentle with a master's touch the next I drank about four beers during that set, and once when the music stopped I heard myself *growling*, deep in my throat. I stopped once I realized I was doing it, and wondered if I'd been making that sound all along.

When the band took a break, I got up to leave, because I'd seen enough. He was a good musician, looked like kind of an arrogant bastard—he took his applause like it was his due, not gracious in the slightest—and what else could I expect to learn, just watching him?

On my way out the door, someone yelled "Ray!" I should've left, but I stopped and turned around, and there was Martin, approaching me, holding out his hand. I shook with him, feeling like my brain had been scooped out. He knew me. It hadn't occurred to me that Lily would have talked to him about me, or that he might've seen pictures, but of course there *were* pictures of Lily and me together, in the country, in the park, just hanging out.

Martin grinned at me, and he seemed to be friendly, but it was still a smirky smile, and I thought maybe he just had an unfortunate face, an asshole's face. "Good set," I said, which was the best I could come up with.

"Better than some, worse than others," he said. "Have a drink with me?" He should've been sweating after all that work he was doing on stage, but he was totally cool and fresh.

Having drinks with Martin was not an experience that fell within my comfort zone. "Thanks anyway, no. I've had enough already tonight."

"Don't have a drink, then. On me."

I still wanted to kill him—and people say that all the time, but I *mean* it, part of me wanted to slam his face into a table until you couldn't tell where skin ended and wood began. But maybe it would be good to talk, hell, maybe he was going to tell me he was breaking up with Lily and I was welcome to take over, or that Lily dug me so much he'd decided to make an exception and let her see me while he was in town.

I know. Fat chance. But a guy's gotta dream.

"Sure, I guess I don't have anywhere to be." So we sat down at a tiny table, way too close together, our knees touching. I slid back and crossed my legs, crossed my arms over my chest.

"What made you decide to come here tonight?" he said.

I shrugged. "Heard there was a good band playing."

He looked amused. "You didn't know I'd be here?"

"Yeah, I knew it was you."

"You wanted to get a look at me."

I shrugged again, beginning to think this was a bad idea.

"You think I'm ... competition. But you misunderstand the situation. There is no competition. Lily and I go way back. Farther back than you can imagine. We belong together. We're the same. I have a connection with her that you never can. We're closer than blood, Ray. She liked you, I know, though she didn't want to tell me much about you. I found the pictures tucked into one of her drawers, that's how I recognized you, but she didn't volunteer to show them to me. I wondered if I would see you around."

"Hey, Lily already dumped me, Martin. You don't have to do a follow-up, OK?" I wanted to make him eat a beer glass.

"No, no, that's not what this is about. What Lily and I have can not be harmed or lessened, and for that reason I *don't* see you as a threat. I am a . . hungry person, Ray. I demand a lot of Lily's time. But . .."

I uncrossed my arms. This sounded like it might be going my way after all.

"We occasionally invite people to bed with us," Martin said. "Women, men, whatever. I've romped with Lily and many of her other summertime romances. She didn't seem to think you'd be interested, but . ." He raised an eyebrow and then, horribly, reached across the table and brushed the back of my hand with his fingers.

"No thanks." I said, not even thinking about it, not even weighing the pleasure of being with Lily against the instinctive revulsion I felt for Martin—the revulsion won, with no calculation necessary. But I was already confused; Lily had told me that Martin was jealous, that he didn't play well with others, and now here he was, coming on to me! Was Lily lying, trying to get rid of me? Using Martin as an excuse for a breakup she wanted to happen anyway?

Ah," Martin said. "Pity. Oh, well. I've got to play another set. Ray. Nice meeting you."

He went back to the stage, and I went out the door, miserable, thinking, *Sometimes it's better not to know.*

That night I slept alone and dreamed of lions, but it was different, this time. Before I'd always delighted in my strength, my grace, the sheer wonder of my leonine form ... but now I sensed that something was terribly wrong. Something was rotten on the savanna, and I don't mean the leftovers from my kills.

Walking, trying to find the source of my unease, I came to a place of tumbled rocks. An old lion lay stretched on a boulder, his mane pure white. He sat with his head on his forepaws, watching me, and I settled down before him, respectful, quiet. I was the head of my pride, the ruler of this territory, but I knew this old lion was something bigger -maybe even a god among lions, at the very least a wise old cat, to have reached such an age. If he was a god, I didn't feel any shock of the divine, or the overwhelming reverence that a human might have felt. I just felt respect.

There is a monster, the old lion said—or gave me to understand, it didn't use words. *An old monster. You must kill it.*

I lifted my head, full of strength and indignation, and made it clear that I would hunt this creature down and kill it.

The old lion shook his head. *Not here,* he said. *The monster is here, yes, but only as you are—in pieces, from long ago. You have to seek him out in the other world. It does not look like a monster there, any more than you look like a lion, but that is what it is, and what you are.*

"I don't understand," I said, and I wasn't a lion anymore—just me, naked and cold, crouching on freezing rocks.

Perhaps you will, the old lion said, and the sadness in him was as heavy as the world. *Or perhaps you will die.*

The old lion rose and padded slowly away, without looking back, and I woke up in bed, thinking *Martin.*

No, I didn't decide Martin was a monster, and that I had to kill him. This isn't a story about me turning into a raving psycho—I don't think. At least, I'm convinced that the things I saw later on, the unbelievable things, were real, as real as hangovers and overdue rent. After the dream, I *did* think I was getting a bit obsessive about things. I mean, Lily had made it clear I was out of her life, whether the reasons she gave me were true or false didn't ultimately matter. If she'd lied to spare my feelings, hell, in a way that was being *nice*, wasn't it? So I tried to forget about her, and Martin, and really get on with my life, not just pretend to do so.

And maybe that would've been it, I would've healed with time and all that, if I hadn't seen Lily, and if I hadn't known the guy she picked up.

Look, it's a big city, right? The odds of me running into Lily were pretty low, so I didn't worry about it. I avoided a couple of the bars that I knew Lily really liked, but otherwise I went about my business. So it was a bad sharp shock when I was in a club called Ugly Everything, propping up the bar while Marie danced with whoever, swinging by every once in a while to urge me onto the dance floor, but I just kissed her cheek and said I'd rather watch her dance, tonight. She was flirting pretty hard with a blonde girl in a short

vinyl skirt who kept throwing me these meaningful glances, and I thought there might be some intriguing three-way action in my future, which made me happy in a vague sort of way—and then I saw Lily

Oh, she looked hot. She wore a tight black dress that stopped at mid-thigh, she had her hair in pigtails, and she wore black boots. I'd never seen her dress like that, she wore dresses pretty often, but nothing so . . well *slutty*. I've got nothing against slutty, mind you. "slut" is hardly a pejorative term in my lexicon, it was just a surprising side of Lily, one I'd never seen before. I looked around for Martin, but didn't see him, and I had a funny feeling that I'd know it if he were here, sense it somehow, or smell him, like something rancid in the air. That didn't make sense, but I'd had enough to drink to accept the idea, almost enough to drink to go talk to Lily Then I looked over at Marie and the blonde, dancing hard in the sweeping lights. I sucked back a little more of my drink and decided I was better off staying in my current situation. Hot sex was a poor substitute for true love, but it was miles better than loneliness and rejection and the ego-bruising I would surely take if I went and talked to Lily.

But why was she here, alone, without Martin? She looked like she was on the prowl, too, dancing with boy after boy. (I couldn't help glancing at her, keeping track of her movements on the dance floor.) Had things fallen through with Martin, or had he left town already after just a few weeks, or was that stuff about them being exclusive just bullshit, as I half-suspected? I realized I was pissed off at her, well and truly, and wondered how long I'd been feeling that way without realizing it, surprised I'd had to get a little drunk for those feelings to bubble up to the surface

I didn't go over to her, and she never looked my way, but I saw her leave with Steven Lee. Steven and I had shot a lot of games of pool together and gotten drunk together a couple of times. we weren't exactly friends, but we had lots of friends in common, and we got along well enough. So when I saw Lily leading him toward the door, holding his hand, while he grinned dopily at his good fortune, I almost shouted, almost told him to be careful. she was a viper, she had a stone-cold heart . . but I didn't say anything. I just watched them go, and even though I believed then that Lily was a tricksome viper, I was jealous of Steven, too. Because I still loved her. That shit doesn't go away. It's not like a poison you can suck out

Then Marie bopped over to me, kissed me on the cheek, and told me she was going back to her place, she'd see me tomorrow. She left with the blonde, and I realized if there was going to be fun tonight, I wasn't invited. Sometimes things just don't go your way

I made my way home, passing Marie's door as I walked to my apartment. Rage Against the Machine was playing from inside, loud. that was Marie's sex music of choice lately. She liked something with a good driving beat to fuck along with. I don't remember when I felt lower. I realized that Marie probably felt the same way about me that I did about her, it was fun to be together, and the sex was nice, but there was no pretense at a deep connection. That depressed me further. I sat in my apartment and watched television, which I almost never do. I don't get cable, and the only thing on was a late movie, some interminably boring cop flick from the early eighties. I watched the whole thing, and then went to bed. I stared at the dark for a long time, and the loneliness settled over me like ashes. This was why I hated to be alone, basically, because in the night, I knew that if I died no one would mourn me, if I disappeared no one would really care; because if there was no one looking at me, shining their light on me, how could I even prove I existed at all?

I finally fell asleep, and I had the big dream, the monster-dream, the dream to end all dreams

It began as the familiar lion dream, my muscles moving easily under tawny skin, the swaying grasses, the world broken into form and shadow. Everything was darker than usual; I didn't normally prowl at night, but there was an urgency now, a sense of hunting to be done, of some beast slouching through the night that had to stopped, had to be *killed*.

A horrible sound rolled across the savanna, shrill as a thousand car alarms, mingled with a low blatting noise. I hated the sound, and wanted to kill whatever made it, tear out whatever throat produced that sound. I ran toward the noise, knowing I'd never heard it before, also knowing it was the voice of my enemy.

I found the monster near the river, drinking, and it lifted its head from the water and gazed at me, smiling. I crouched, tensed to leap, but then just stood, frozen. I'd never seen a creature like this, in or out of waking life, and it smelled all wrong—like a man, and like a scorpion, and like a snake, and—worst of all—like a *lion*. No surprise. it was a mix-up beast, composed of all those things. It's body was that of a lion's, only larger than mine, with powerful haunches and a wide chest, and the fur was weirdly purplish, like clouds at dusk. Instead of a brushlike lion's tail, the thing had a segmented scorpion's tail, rising behind it in a deadly curve. A drop of yellow venom fell from the stinger as I watched, and where it struck the clay on the riverbank, it sizzled

The thing's head was the worst. It had a human head, bald as an infant, chubby-cheeked, with green eyes that leaked brownish fluid from the corners. It opened its mouth, showing off a triple row of triangular teeth, like a shark's. It made that noise again—shrill piping, low blat.

THIS ISN'T A STORY ABOUT ME TURNING INTO A RAVING PSYCHO—I DON'T THINK. I'M CONVINCED THE THINGS I SAW LATER ON, THE UNBELIEVABLE THINGS, WERE REAL.

It sounded like a flute and a trumpet, played at the same time.

Then, bang, I wasn't a lion anymore, I was a man, crouched stupidly on all fours by the river, looking across the water at this *thing*, this creature that was teaching me the meaning of the word "nightmare."

Then the monster changed, too, and became a naked man smeared with mud and blood. He walked toward me, arms out stretched, unsmiling—but I knew he still had a triple row of teeth inside his closed mouth, nothing but shredding incisors, a bite like knives. And once he reached me, he would wrap me up in his arms, open wide, and fucking *eat* me. Because he was a man-eater. And, just my luck, I wasn't a lion anymore. I was a man. I was his favorite thing on the menu.

I woke before he reached me and rolled out of bed, rushing to the bathroom. I splashed water on my face. Somewhere on the

street a car alarm was whooping, and I stuck my head under the flow of water from the faucet so the water rushing by my ears would drown out the sound.

So the man, on the riverbank, in my dream?

Yeah. That's right. It was Martin.

The next day I was at the coffee shop, trying to work, every word a struggle, with my head full of bad echoes from the dream, that awful flute-and-trumpet cry, the monster with its tripled teeth. I'd just deleted another paragraph when my friend Jade-Lynne came in and sat across from me, huffing. "Have you seen that motherfucker Steven Lee?" she said, without preface.

I blinked at her. "Last night . . ."

"Everybody saw him last night. What I want to know is, where's he at *now*?" Her hair, an explosion of black braids woven with bright ribbons, waved as she shook her head angrily. "He was supposed to be at my house at 10 o'clock this morning to help me move. Now it's 2, and he's nowhere to be found. I beat on his apartment door for 15 minutes, and called his cell phone, which is turned *off* and paged him, and nothing."

Ah. I said, just a meaningless syllable, while my brain swirled in its juices. Steven had left with Lily, doubtless to spend the night, so he was probably still there, right? Just lost track of time. But why wasn't he answering his phone or his pager? And Lily was an early riser, usually up with the daylight, so I couldn't believe they were still in bed, unless they were *seriously* hung over. "I don't know, Jade. I'll let you know if I see him."

"preciate it," she said, and wandered off.

I drummed my fingers on the table, sighed, and packed up my laptop. I went down the street a couple of blocks to a pay phone. (I don't have a cell, sometimes I like to be unreachable.)

I plugged in dimes and nickels, slowly. This was crass: this was low cons, this was necessary. Steven was something like a friend, at least, and Jade-Lynne was definitely a friend, so I should do what I could to find Steven, right? Especially since I was probably the only person in the whole city who knew who he'd gone home with last night.

And, I admit, I wanted Lily to know I'd seen her leave with another guy. I wanted to put her on the spot. I wanted her to twist a little.

Love's not just sweetness, it's flowers wrapped in razorwire.

I dialed Lily's number.

It picked up on the second ring. "Yes?" Martin said.

I stood, frozen. I hadn't expected Martin to answer, but why not? Why wouldn't he be over there? Maybe they'd fucked. Steven together.

"Hello, hello?" Martin said, more annoyed than amused. "Can I help you, Mr. Silence?"

I don't think I was even breathing. That voice. It was exactly the same as the voice in my dream. I might have been dreaming even then.

Then Martin shouted. I don't know if it was just something he did to fuck with prank callers, or if he knew it was me and meant me to hear it.

He screamed, "Lions and tigers and bears, oh my! Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!"

I jerked the phone away from my ear and slammed it down.

Fuck this, I thought. Steven wasn't my problem, and Lily and Martin had zero bearing on my life. I went to my apartment, brewed a pot of coffee, and watched TV all afternoon and into the night.

Finally, about 10 o'clock, feeling stupefied, I roused myself. This was stupid, stupid. I shouldn't be wallowing. I called Marie, but she wasn't in, which meant she was probably out at a bar already, unless she was working. That almost put me down again, but I resisted the entropy that sucked at my bones and put my shoes and jacket on. I wasn't happy with Marie anyway, and I wasn't going to find a better lover sitting around my apartment, so I had to go out. In the movies it's mostly women who are concerned about finding true love, while the men drift along, oblivious; that's just another bullet point on the list of bullshit Hollywood perpetrates, because men are out there looking for love, too, something true and deep and good that lasts. I'd spent too much time pissing and moaning over Lily, who didn't love me anymore, if she ever had. Now it was Saturday night, moving-along time.

I went to a bar, and then another bar, and then another, having a drink, sampling the crowd, moving on. Around 11:30 I bumped into Jade-Lynne, who was morosely drinking something made of vodka and Red Bull. "Did you ever find Steven?" I asked.

"No." She peered into her drink, then looked at me, her green eyes troubled. "I'm past pissed and approaching worried. Turns out a *lot* of people have been going missing lately. You know Charlie Johnson, plays bass for Dead Baby Joke?"

"vaguely," I said.

"He's gone, too, he disappeared last week, poof. Some other guys, too, people I don't know. They go out clubbing one night, and they never come back." She gave me a wan smile. "So watch yourself, huh? I don't know what's happening, but I'd hate you to join the land of the missing."

"Shit." I leaned against the bar. "People are really disappearing?"

"That's the word. Half a dozen. Maybe more. I don't know if the cops are involved or what. I mean, missing persons, shit. What are they going to do? People go missing all the time."

I nodded. Maybe I should call Lily again, she might have been the last person to see Steven, and if he was just the latest in a long line of guys going missing . . . Or maybe Lily was involved. Of course that occurred to me, I won't pretend it didn't, but come on. I didn't really *believe* it. I wasn't living in some suspense flick, you know? The idea that Lily could have something to do with disappearances, it was just too out there.

Martin. on the other hand.

I dismissed it. *Not my problem.* That's been my mantra for a long time, and it's gotten me through some rough shit. "Take it easy, Jade-Lynne," I said, then paused. "You still need help moving?"

She raised her eyebrow. "Yeah. You offering?"

I nodded. We'd been close friends, once, and could be again, if I got my head out of my ass and my mind off of Lily. "I'll come over tomorrow morning."

"You're a good man, Ray," she said seriously, and I laughed, kind of embarrassed, and went out on the sidewalk to smoke a cigarette.

It was dark and cold, and I was thinking of going home. Getting out of my apartment had cleared my head, and I felt better. The only problem with going home was that I might *sleep*, and that was no good, because I might dream about Martin as a monster again. or about Lily. There was no peace in being a lion in my sleep anymore.

I finished my cigarette and pitched the butt into the gutter, and then I saw the lion across the street.

I never thought for a second I was dreaming. I knew real life, and this was it, and there was a fucking lion across the street, but I didn't think it was an escapee from a zoo or anything, either, because it was the old lion from my dream, silver mane, dark eyes, the dignity of years. It stood across the street, in an alleyway, and it looked at me, then trotted down the alley.

"Damn," I said, and looked around, but there was no one else on the street at the moment, no one to say "Shit, did you see that lion?" so I could say "Yeah, we'd better call 911."

I crossed the street and stopped at the mouth of the alley. "Is there a lion in here?" I said, not shouting but not whispering either, peering into the dark.

"Nobody here but us chickens," said an old-man voice, and I almost jumped out of my fucking skin, because I did *not* expect to hear a human voice.

"Sorry," I said. "Didn't mean to bother you." So I *was* hallucinating. That was an interesting addition to my list of problems.

"Ray, do you work at being so dumb?"

I didn't move. "Ah. No. It's a native talent. Do I know you?"

"We've met." Something rustled, like a body moving on newspapers. "In dreams. In the jungle, the mighty jungle ..." His voice was sweet and high. "Do I have to draw you a picture? There is a monster, Ray. It's in your territory. My territory, too, but I'm old, and alone. You have people, a group, a *pride*."

I thought of Jade-Lynne, of Steven, of Susie and Nick, even of people I barely knew, like Charlie Johnson. They were the closest thing I had to family, a bunch of individuals swirling past each other, sleeping together and borrowing money and enacting petty betrayals, helping and hurting. Were they my tribe? Were they the pride I dreamed about?

"The monster is taking your people," the old man in the alley said. "You have to stop him."

"I don't get a magic sword or some stalwart companions to help me, do I?" I said, my mouth running on autopilot, as it so often does, while my mind played catch up.

"This is real life, son. Even if parts of it *do* look like special effects."

"What am I supposed to do?"

"Look up the street," he said, and I did—

—and there was Lily, decked out in her sexy-red-dress best, getting into a cab, pulling some guy in with her, and the car drove away.

"Shit," I said, and wondered if that guy, whoever it was, was ever going to come home again.

"Follow that car," the old voice said, and chuckled. There was another rustling noise, and then nothing.

"Hey," I said. "Hey, I'm still in the dark about a lot of stuff, here," but there was no response, and I got the sense I was talking to empty space, anyway.

I found a pay phone and called a cab, but it didn't come right away, so I stood on the street for 20 minutes, stomping my feet, thinking about my dreams, wondering if I was going crazy, wondering if it mattered, knowing I had to go to Lily's and find out what was going on.

The cab came. I gave the driver directions to Lily's neighborhood and got out about a block from her house. There was light in her living room window, but the bedroom was dark, which might or might not have been a good sign. I walked toward her house, trying to think what I'd say, especially if Martin answered the door. "Hi, I changed my mind, and I would like to be in a wild three-way with you and Lily"? Or "Hi, an old lion in an alley told me you were a monster, could you get the fuck out of town"?

I didn't feel like much of a lion as I went up the walk, up her steps. I took a breath and knocked on Lily's door.

The inner door creaked open, and Lily stood behind the screen, wearing the white robe I'd seen her in so many times. Her hair was messed up, like she'd just had sex, and for all I knew, she had. Her eyes widened, then narrowed. "Ray, get out of here." But she didn't close the door, didn't move, so I didn't, either.

"Lily—look, we really need to talk."

She shook her head. "We had something good, Ray, but it's over now, I'm sorry. Please don't come here again."

"Fuck, Lily," I said, and banged my hand against the frame of the door; she didn't jump, just stared at me. "Look, I know something's going on. I saw you leave the club with Steven Lee last night, and nobody's seen him since, and I saw you with another guy tonight, and—shit. I've had these *dreams* .. and Martin asked me if I wanted to have a *threesome* with you—"

Lily shook her head, sharply, and I wondered if she was drunk, or on something; she seemed distracted. "I know you met Martin, Ray, he told me. I thought you'd stay away after that, that it would be enough . you have to leave here."

"What do you care where I go? You dumped me like a sack of shit, Lily."

She stared at me. "I dumped you to *save* you, Ray," she said, her voice low. "I didn't let him ... have you ... even though he wanted you. I was always Lily with you, not the Judas goat."

I just looked at her, wondering what she was talking about, afraid I sort of knew. She started to close the door, and her robe fell open, and I saw the blood smeared on her chest, on her breasts. It wasn't her blood. I knew that.

I thought of her in bed with Martin, and another man, the man *between* the two of them, the man bleeding, and the blood smearing on Lily's breasts, and Martin's chest. I think I lost my mind a little, then. I couldn't make sense of what I knew of Lily, and of that image. They didn't fit together at all.

Somewhere in the house a man screamed, and then the screaming stopped abruptly. Lily's eyes widened in alarm, and she turned away, the door not quite closed.

I didn't think. I just wrenched open the screen door and charged in.

"No, Ray!" Lily said, but I shouldered my way past her into the living room. It was just like I remembered, but it was obvious Martin lived here now, there were new books, instrument cases, a jacket hanging over a chair, boots by the door, little indelible traces of him.

I could *smell* Martin, like riverwater and desert sand, and I smelled blood, it was like being a lion in my dream, every sense cranked up.

I growled and went straight to the bedroom, expecting to see blood and horror, Martin crouched naked over a body, but the bedroom was empty, though there were more traces of Martin's presence, intermingled with Lily's. Where the hell was Martin, and the man who'd screamed?

"Ray," Lily said, clutching her robe closed again, doing her best to look serious and reasonable. "I don't know what you think you're doing, but you have to go." She hesitated. "Don't make me call the police."

> "Our ancestors mated freely with spirits of the desert, with giants of the earth. It's only traces in the bloodline, in most people, but some of us ... have more."

I just stared at her. "I saw the *blood*. Go ahead and call the police, please! Where's Martin?"

"He's not here. What are you talking about, blood?" Her knuckles were white, clenching the robe closed all the way to her neck.

I went down the short hallway, but Martin wasn't in the bathroom or the little laundry room or the kitchen, and that was *it*, there was no more house.

Except there was a basement, the doorway tucked into one corner of the kitchen, and then stairs leading down. I'd never been down there. Lily said it was full of old filing cabinets and broken chairs and shit. Move along, nothing to see here.

Lily had trailed after me through the house, telling me to leave,

but when I stared at the basement door in the kitchen she jerked open a drawer and took out a butcher knife. She held it, the point aimed at my face, and stalked toward me. I backed up. This was some twisted shit

"You have to leave. You have to stop making noise, or he'll know you're here ... and then I can't be responsible. I don't want anything bad to happen to you, don't you understand that?"

I took a step forward. "Lily," I said, my voice breaking. "How could

> FOR A MOMENT, I SWEAR, HIS TAIL BECAME A SERPENT, WITH A HISSING HEAD ON ONE END, AND IT LOOKED AT ME WITH YELLOW EYES, COMPREHENDING ME TOTALLY.

you get mixed up in this?" Whatever the hell "this" was. Martin was doing something nasty, and Lily was helping, but I didn't know what that had to do with lions or voices coming from alleyways, maybe nothing, maybe that was just the seasoning in this crazy soup.

"We all *need* things," she said. "Martin isn't like other people—he isn't like people at all, Ray. Anemics need iron, diabetics need insulin. Martin needs ..." She shook her head

"Sex? Death? Rabies shots?" I said, making an effort to speak quietly, because that seemed to chill her out, a little.

"Blood," she said. "And .. everything else. Flesh. Clothes. Life. He consumes it all. I don't have to watch that part. I do help with the rest, sometimes, with the luring in, the seducing." She sighed. "He doesn't do it often, Ray, you must understand, almost never, but every few years ... he binges. He has to, to stay alive, it's his nature. Martin is very old, Ray, he's an old *soul*. He says I have an old soul, too, that there are myths under my skin, that he can help me live forever. Who else can love me for so long, Ray? Who else could love me forever? Not you. You could love me as well as Martin, but not for so long." Her eyes were pleading. She wanted me to *understand*.

"Baby, Martin is fucking with your head. I don't know what he's told you, but what do you mean, you could live forever? I don't—

"We *all* have myths inside us, strains of the old creatures, shreds of the old spirits. Our ancestors mated freely with spirits of the desert, with giants of the earth. It's only traces in the bloodline, in most people, but some of us ... some of us have more, in some of us, the old blood runs strong." She touched her hair self-consciously. "Martin says I have an island woman far back in my ancestry, a strange ancient sort of woman who turned her lovers to stone, but loved them just the same .. Martin says he can help me grow into those powers. Just being in Martin's presence brings it out in me—I get younger, healthier—his presence does that to *everyone* who has the old blood. Martin won't say what *you* have, but he told me about meeting you at the club, told me he saw something strong and dangerous in you. He wanted me to bring you home, bring you to *him*, so he could take what you have into himself ... and I *denied him*." She shook the knife at me like a maraca. "I have never denied him *anything*, but I would not let him have that, I wouldn't let him have you, you stupid shit, because I *love* you. But now you're here, and if you don't get out now—"

"What about Martin's ancestry? What myth does he have under *his* skin?" The things she said were crazy, but they took place in the context of a greater madness in which they made sense, because suddenly I *knew* what I had, far back in my spiritual ancestry. Some multiple-great-grandparent of mine had mated with something on the savanna, some lion god, and the lingering effects were still with me. But what the hell had Martin's ancestors mated with?

Lily shook her head. "Martin isn't like us, he isn't a half breed. He *is* the myth, the thing entire. He was born in the heart of a jungle before civilization was born, and he has lived in deserts and groves. He is *mardikhora*, man slayer, manticore, with a tail of stinging spines, a triple row of teeth in a human head, his voice like trumpet and flute played together...." Her voice was dreamy, distant, and her words had the flavor of a recitation, they chilled me down to the guts and marrow. "He was always *partly* a man, and he can make himself seem to be completely a man. Except ..." she glanced toward the door at her back

I understood. "Except when he feeds. Right? Then he's all monster." I shook my head. "At least he's got an excuse; it's what he *is*. But you chose to help him." My voice thickened; I thought I might cry. "I can't believe I ever loved you."

"I think you can't love as deeply as I do," she said, simply, without malice, and it made my heart clench. "And you must know, I love you as much as I do him. He will simply be with me longer, and I had to choose."

"I'm going to kill him."

"You'll die, if you try that." She lowered the knife. "I don't *want* you to die."

"He's part lion, isn't he, Lily?"

She frowned. "He ... has a lion's body, sometimes."

"I think that's why I hate him so much," I said. "Because he's a—a *perversion* of what I am."

"What you are? You're ... a lion?"

I looked at the basement door. "I have to go."

"I didn't know you were brave," she said. "A lion." There was wonderment in her voice, and worry. She stared at me, her eyes wide, her expression fixed. Her hair fluttered, as if moved by a breeze

I ground my teeth together, as suddenly my arms and legs became too heavy to move. I felt like I'd been turned to stone; there might have been concrete poured into my stomach, lead wrapped around my bones.

But my enemy was below, in his lair, and I could *smell* him, and he was killing my pride.

I grunted and took a step forward, breaking whatever spell Lily had put on me, whatever weight of myth she'd brought to bear. She'd tried to turn me to stone ... and the worst part was, she wanted to do it for my own *good*, to save me. She gasped when I moved, dropped her knife with a clatter, and fell to her knees. Something had snapped in her head, I think, or else I'd snapped it when I fought her, put too much strain on her psychic sinew and tore it. She crouched, swaying, shaking her head. She would be all right, or she wouldn't—I couldn't do anything about it.

I picked up the knife with my left hand, looking at the blade, thinking of what might be waiting for me down below. Lily could turn people to stone, maybe, sort of, and Martin was an out-and-out monster, suddenly having the soul of a big cat didn't seem like such hot shit. But I'd do what I had to. I opened the door.

I expected the basement to be dark, but I guess Martin liked to see what he was doing, because there was track lighting down there, bright as the inside of a supermarket. The basement was one big room, and there were dark stains on the concrete floor, some of them several feet in diameter.

Martin was

When I had my dream of Martin by the river, I could see him, I

could *see* the monster. And having that experience—ephemeral though it was—gave me some context for understanding what I saw there in the basement, seeing what Martin *really* was. I don't think most people are capable of seeing and interpreting shit like that. If humans ever could see and understand such things, that ability has pretty much been bred out of us as a species.

Martin was a monster, a manticore, but he shifted—his fur was the purple of dusk, then a matted red, then faded orange, and then tawny, lion-colored. His tail rose, segmented like a scorpion's, long spikes sprouting from the tail and then disappearing. For a moment, I swear, his tail became a serpent, with a hissing head on the end, and it looked at me with yellow eyes, comprehending me totally. Martin, the monster, had his back end toward me, his head bowed over something that I could only see parts of—legs, a hand. His latest victim.

I growled, and I must have stopped thinking and let instinct take over totally, because I *jumped* down the six or seven stairs to the floor. I landed in a crouch, the knife in my hand. I want to say I was not myself then, that I was possessed, that some greater force was moving *through* me—but it's not true.

I was me, all the way down, more myself than I'd ever been before.

Martin didn't even notice me. He was too busy eating. I didn't want to see that, understand how it could be possible, how something his size—a little bigger than a lion—could devour a whole person, clothes and all.

The tail was a scorpion's then, not the terribly self-aware snake, and so I approached almost without fear, my knife raised high, and plunged it into his back with a cry.

The tail smashed me aside, though I kept my grip on the knife, and I fell to the concrete, landing so hard on my shoulder that my right arm went totally numb. The monster turned his face toward me, eyes slitted in fury, blood pouring from the wound in his side. I could only see there, staring. The monster's head was like a baby's, smooth and round, fat-cheeked, but it was also clearly *Martin*'s face. He opened his mouth, revealing the triple rows of teeth, and music came out, flute and trumpet.

I rolled over onto my stomach, protecting my softest spot, and lifted the knife with my left hand.

"You *hurt* me," he said, in that bass-treble blatting voice. "I didn't think you had so much lion in you."

I bared my teeth and struggled to my knees. His tail lifted, curling, and the spikes reappeared, sliding out like cat's claws. The spikes were a foot long, poison, instant death, I *knew* it.

"I'm part lion," the manticore said, all trumpet now, all blatting. "I *was* a lion, long ago, but my line ... diverged. *Improved*. The pure lions still hate me for that. Even your bastard, half-imagined blood has some potency, enough to *sting* me, but that's all."

He wasn't going to die from the stab wound. That was quite clear. I'd hurt him, sure, but not enough. I wondered if the old lion from the alley would come crashing through a basement window, jump on Martin's back, tear him a new asshole.

I didn't think so. I didn't think it was a night for that kind of miracle.

"I'll never know what Lily saw in you," he said, and his tail twitched.

It was too much. Such a fucking prosaic old-boyfriend thing to say, and it was coming from this inhuman thing, this shiny baby-headed monster with spikes on his tail.

I laughed. That was all I had left, right? He was going to kill me, but I laughed. And I still had the knife, after all. Maybe I could jump at him, stick it in his eye, get to his brain. What did I have to lose?

Martin scowled, and his tail uncurled, the spikes dripping venom. I looked him in the eyes. "I bet I'm better in bed than you are," I said.

His tail drew back, and I tensed to jump, to laugh in his face and stab before his spikes nailed me.

Then his tail stopped and began to change. At first I thought it was just another transformation, that his tail would become a snake and bite me, or that the spikes would sprout barbs. But that wasn't it—the tail was turning gray, and then tiny cracks appeared in it, like stress fractures. The spikes fell away, shattering on the concrete floor. Martin looked back at his tail, his human face wearing an expression of total horror. The grayness crept up his tail, up his hindquarters, and his horrible too-human eyes widened as his legs turned to stone.

We both looked up the stairs. Lily was there, sitting on the steps. Her robe was open, and her front was all blood. She wept, her face shiny with tears, and her hair positively *writhed*, like a nest of angry snakes.

"Lily," Martin said, his voice all trilling flute, as the petrification crept up his body. She didn't look at him. She didn't look at me, either, though.

Martin snapped his jaws. The gray slowly crawled up his neck, and then his head. He froze that way, his jaws open. He looked like a gruesome piece of cement lawn art—more cartoonish than monstrous in this fixed state, more comprehensible to human eyes.

I dropped the knife and ran toward the stairs, but by the time my foot touched the bottom step I couldn't move any farther—it was like trying to walk through a solid stone wall. Lily looked past me at Martin.

"You saved me," I said. "You *chose* me."

"You both would have died," she said tonelessly. "Martin would have killed you, but you would have stabbed him before you died, and there is enough lion in you for that wound to be fatal. I know; my ancestors were oracles, and I can see enough of the future to know what would happen. I wanted to save one of you. I couldn't turn *you* to stone, not entirely, you're too human ... but Martin is more susceptible to these old things, these old powers. A weakness to go with his strength." She looked at me then, her eyes all pupil, all black, her hair twisting on her shoulders. "I hate both of you," she said. "I hate both of you for making me choose."

She went up the stairs. I couldn't follow—the air stayed thick for another half hour, and even then I had to fight my way up the stairs, one at a time.

I never saw Lily again.

The next day I helped Jade-Lynne move, and we talked about Steven, how we hoped he was OK, wherever he was. I didn't tell her Steven was in the belly of a statue of a manticore in a basement across town. She wouldn't have believed me. I carried boxes all day. Jade-Lynne flirted with me, even, and another day it would have gone somewhere, but no way, not then.

This all happened a while ago, you know, months and months, but I still haven't figured out how I feel about it. I still dream about being a lion, but I haven't seen the old lion again. Maybe he died. I spend more time with my friends, but I haven't been on a date in ages; haven't had sex, either.

I went to Nick and Susie's wedding last weekend. They held hands at the altar, like they couldn't stop touching each other for even that long. I decided they were better off together, just the two of them, for now, for the moment, and that had to be enough, didn't it? I cried at the ceremony, and even I'm not sure why. Everything hurts, more or less, every day.

You know what I wish, mostly?

I wish Lily had turned my heart to stone. Just my heart. That would have been enough, I think. To have a still, stony heart; something heavy, but not so heavy I couldn't forget about the weight, light enough that I could forget, sometimes, why I was still carrying it around. ❧

The Runes of ELFLAND

Brian Froud and Ari Berk use art, intuition, and storytelling to cross the threshold of Faery.

BY ARI BERK • ART BY BRIAN FROUD

IN THEIR NEW BOOK, *THE RUNES OF ELFLAND*, FROUD AND BERK explore landscapes of imagination and folklore, working from the shapes and sounds of the ancient runic alphabet. *Realms of Fantasy* gets an early glimpse into this unique artistic collaboration.

What came first, the paintings or the stories?

Brian Froud. Well, I actually painted the rune series about ten years before we conceived the book, however, runes have always been woven into the fabric of my art. When I looked at a tree or a rock and images of faeries and trolls appeared, they were often "captioned" by runes. Runes were inscribed on goblin caps in Jim Henson's film *Labyrinth*, usually spelling out something in dubious taste. They were a kind of secret code—always containing a message, if sometimes rather whimsical in content, but gradually I wondered what they really wanted to say. I wanted to bring them from the background into the foreground.

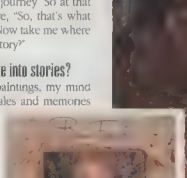
Ari Berk. For me, of course, the process really began when I first saw Brian's paintings, long after they were finished. I've loved Brian's art ever since I first read *Faeries*, but I was amazed at the rune paintings—they were like no art of his I'd ever seen before. I've always been fascinated by the ways a rune can express itself, as a symbol, or charm, or story, and so I wanted to explore these various voices when responding to Brian's paintings.

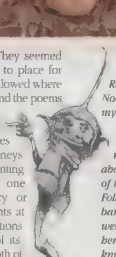
How did the runes translate into paintings?

BF Their angular forms have a power and urgency—no languid meandering curves, only purposeful directness. I was intrigued to see such fluid vitality in such ancient patterns. So from my interest in their forms I derived the inspiration for the paintings. I worked from very rough sketches, performed no research apart from my lifelong interest in Northern mythology. As with all my art, I wanted the images to suggest a story, though I had no idea (even when they were finished) what that story was. I approach painting in this very open way, as a journey. If I knew the destination beforehand, I probably would never set off. Working from small abstract pencil ideas in my sketchbook, I start to draw upon my board, roughing the form in relationship to a geometric grid that lies hidden beneath all my art. I add more characters or objects that feel appropriate, their larger relationship to the overall work still elusive to me. The most creative act of a painter is to stop at the right moment. It's only when the last stroke of color is put down that the painting is in balance. Yet, to me, art is never finished. My part done, now I have arrived at the first destination of the painting's journey. So at that point, I say to the picture, "So, that's what you wanted to look like. Now take me where you want. What is *your* story?"

And how did they translate into stories?

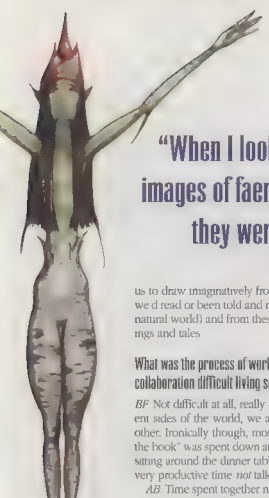
AB As I looked at the paintings, my mind immediately filled with tales and memories of tales. Specifically, the paintings reminded me of fragments of traditional folklore that I felt moved to explore in ways that played with the imagery, feeling, or tone of the painting. I did not always write a story explicitly about the faery creature depicted. Often, I wrote about the world just beyond the image. The paintings also inspired tales that I had never seen or heard before but that still felt familiar, like stones waiting to be discovered in the land. The first sentence I wrote for the book was, "A single word can be a world and every letter a land," because from the first time I looked at the art, I thought of landscapes. Although the main subjects are the faeries themselves, I saw each of them as a guardian or guide to a different part of the faery world. They seemed to open doors to place for me. Gladly, I followed where the doors led, and the poems and stories I wrote are really travelogues of those journeys through the runes. For each painting I wrote three different texts: one poem or "charm," one story or "telling," and a "gift" that points at some of the possible interpretations of the rune as well as some of its associated folklore. I think for both of us, looking at each rune, considering its shape and sound, allowed





ABOVE "From the perilous mound I rise renewed as Lord of Talents, First Revealer, Master of Revels, Splendor at Noon, Golden, Youthful, seven sights, in my bright eye" From "A Rune of Skill"

OPPOSITE "So she came to the marsh where strange lights move above the waters and polished trunks of trees attend the ground like bones. Following the lights she came to the barrow mound and found the dead were waiting for her. The sword was hers, they said, but she would need to know how to wield it. She would save the land, they said, if the sword was held aright" From "A Rune of Protection"



"When I looked at a tree or a rock and images of faeries and trolls appeared, they were often captioned by runes."

us to draw imaginatively from our inner resources (stories we'd read or been told and remembered, imagery from the natural world) and from these elements we built the paintings and tales.

What was the process of working together like? Was collaboration difficult living so far apart?

BF Not difficult at all, really. For people who live on different sides of the world, we actually see quite a lot of each other. Ironically though, most of the time we "worked on the book" was spent down at the pub, walking the moor, or sitting around the dinner table. We spent a huge amount of very productive time *not* talking about it.

AB Time spent together not working on the book opens the reasoning mind to a more intuitive and organic process. That was certainly one of the best aspects of this collaboration: a real sense of trust in each other's work and vision, and not worrying too much about the outcome. We knew that the book was there, and just wrote and painted until it was done.

BF I don't like to plan too much. It gets in the way of one's creative work. You get stuck on an approach or an idea and stop responding to the project intuitively. Once begun, a book does tend to go its own way.

AB And get its own way! I remember working on a certain rune and thinking I was finished with its particular story, but something just did not feel right and I couldn't put it aside.

BF Faeries!

AB Well, yes. *They* always seemed to know when a story was finished, and until it was, I got no rest at all. It's strange how when one writes about Themselves, one feels sort of obligated to get it right.

BF Well, consider the consequences otherwise.

AB Exactly.

Will there be other Froud/Berk collaborations?

BF: We have several projects we're working on. One is a follow-up to *Runes* that will have 24 new paintings (48 total) done as a book/card set like the *Faeries' Oracle*.

AB With the intention that they can be used for storytelling.

BF We are also in the midst of transcribing—and disinfecting—a book on Goblins involving both the highly secret and potentially unreliable Goblin Camera I've developed, and some dubious pages from the infamous, semi-sacred, and sticky *Codex Goblmensis* recently unearthed and translated by Professor Berk.

AB But the less said about those the better.

BF Indeed.

AB Also a book on Trolls is the works, and a children's story I've written called "Hobyah." So we're keeping busy.

BF Although each book is really different in tone, attitude, and style, it's interesting how related they all are. Each attempts to bring the numinous world closer to our own, each is in some way about human relationships with the Otherworld, and each tries, in its own way, to evoke wonder through delight, imagination, and occasional flatulence—I mean, irreverence.

With a work such as *Runes* that seems to defy ordinary genres, how do you expect people to approach this book?

BF Hopefully, in a spirit of exploration, and perhaps surprise. Much of the art was a surprise to me, by the time it was finished. I tried in the art—as I know Alan did in the stories—to let the runes speak for themselves, through the mirror of my imagination.

AB. I hope the book will encourage readers to put their own imaginations in touch with the earth, to see the living worlds around them as sacred landscapes filled with spirit beings, and to learn how to see themselves as part of tradition. To know whether they read this book in England or Encino—that the land around them is alive, imbued with rich inspiration for life's journey. ❧

A World of Froud/Imaginosis book, *The Runes of Elfland* is published by Abrams Books. For more information, please visit *www.worldoffroud.com*

OPPOSITE "In Elfland, the moon has a hundred names, but the most sacred and secret name is translated to mean 'marker of years,' evidence of both her high status and the existence of elvish lunar time-keeping." From "A Rune of Fortune"

WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF ILLUSION, AND THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM. BUT SOMETIMES THEY ARE.

YAMABUSHI

BY RICHARD PARKS
ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL LEE

After the end of the war with the Taira and the death of the child Emperor Antoku, the warrior named Minamoto no Enyo returned to his own province. There he shaved his head, adopted simple, unadorned clothing, and disappeared into the mountains. Naturally those who knew him assumed he had decided to become a monk. ■ Enyo didn't know what people assumed, nor did he care. His reasons were his own and the mountains, for their part, assumed nothing. The *tengu*, on the other hand, assumed a great deal. ■ When the tengu looked down its long nose at the human climbing up the mountain trail, it was beside itself with joy. Enyo's shaved head and simple garments surely were those of a *yamabushi* and, as all know, it is a tengu's nature to tempt and trick holy men from the path of true righteousness. Just as a tiger must roar and a sparrow chirp so must a mountain goblin mislead, and this one set out to do just that. The tengu adopted its favorite disguise and appeared before Enyo as a fellow yamabushi. ■ "Good morning," the tengu said, bowing in greeting. "My name is Yoritomo. You look hot, my friend, and tired. If you would listen to me now, I can save you some trouble." ■ "I'm Enyo, and I'm all for avoiding trouble," Enyo said. "I'll listen to anything you have to say." ■ "I'm sorry to tell you that there is something wrong with these mountains," the tengu said. "Walk their circuit for years as I have done, but you will find no peace here, no enlightenment. This is a very bad place to practice your art; I am leaving them myself for a place farther north." ■ "No doubt the spiritual shortcomings of these mountains is a quite unfortunate matter," Enyo said. "But what I'd really like to know about is the fishing. How is that?"

The tengu was so startled by the question that it told the simple truth. "Ummm ... fishing? Quite good, I should think. There are many unspoiled streams and quiet pools along this path."

Enyo smiled. "Excellent." He bid the tengu a pleasant afternoon and resumed his journey. The tengu watched him go, and after a moment it smiled. Clearly this human was going to be a challenge.

The tengu followed Enyo for the next few days, hoping for some clue as to how best to turn him from the path of righteousness, but so far as the tengu could tell, Enyo wasn't on the path of righteousness in the first place. He did not chant the Lotus Sutra daily, or even once. He did not meditate. He did not purify himself in cold mountain streams, though he did bathe regularly. He ate when he was hungry, slept when he was tired, and, once or twice when he came to a promising stream, he fished with a line he kept tied around a wooden dowel in his pack.

This must be a trick, thought the tengu, but for the life of the creature it couldn't tell what the trick might be. The tengu finally wondered if, perhaps, it had been mistaken about Enyo. Only his short robes and his shaved head suggested the yamabushi path; nothing else about him did. Yet the tengu had judged Enyo to be of noble birth, his manner was of one who had both given and taken commands. Why was he here, so far from the comforts of home and obligations of station, if not as one who had renounced the world? A disgraced nobleman, perhaps, one who had gone outlaw and simply adopted a convenient disguise? Possible.

The tengu decided to test that idea. It disguised itself as a pretty young servant, then cast an illusion around a stone to make it appear to be a small golden statue of Jizo. The tengu sat down beside the trail in a place where it knew Enyo must pass, set the golden statue on the ground, and began to weep, a splendid tableau of distressed and vulnerable womanhood.

The gold or the girl, one or both will surely tempt him.

Actually, it was the tengu's considered opinion that it now appeared so winsome and the gold so inviting that even a man who was neither outlaw nor bandit would be sorely tempted, so it was with quite a bit of anticipation that the creature awaited Enyo's arrival.

"Good afternoon," Enyo said politely, when he finally arrived. "What's troubling you?"

"Oh, sir," the tengu said, "my mistress sent me to make an important offering to the temple at En, and I've become quite lost in these terrible mountains. I've been wandering for days!"

Enyo nodded. "Well then, be comforted—the very path beside you is the correct one. Just follow it in that direction," he pointed back down the path the way he had come, "and it will lead you to the temple at En directly. I've seen no one on the path save a wandering monk; I'm sure you will have no trouble."

Enyo resumed his journey without another word. The tengu just stared after him in amazement. When Enyo was out of sight the tengu resumed its true form but continued to stare.

As a master of misdirection, the tengu knew feigned disinterest when it saw it. And, for that matter, feigned interest. Indeed, "feigned" anything was as transparent as air to the tengu. And, while the tengu did notice an oddity in the monk's voice and manner when he addressed the servant girl, Enyo had barely glanced at the gold and had shown no inclination to try to possess either. This made no sense to the tengu, hard as it tried to puzzle the matter out. It was one thing if a true yamabushi had shown such restraint; the tengu could respect the man's fortitude and sharpen its plans. Such things raised the level of the contest. Yet for a normal, healthy man to act so was just ... well, it was just *wrong*, and the tengu resolved to tell him so before it killed him.

When Enyo followed the mountain trail to the crest of a tall ridge, the tengu was there, standing squarely in Enyo's path, waiting for him. The tengu did not bother with a disguise this time. It still wore the clothing of a yamabushi, but the face it wore now was its true face, so far as a tengu had one: long nose, bushy hair and eyebrows, dark red eyes.

"I am the one you knew as Yoritomo," it said. "I am a tengu."

Enyo just nodded. "I wondered. The only other Yoritomo I knew was Minamoto no Yoritomo; it did seem strange to meet another of such a famous name at this remote place. What is it you want of me, tengu?"

The tengu simply raised his sword. "I am going to kill you."

Enyo just shrugged. "May I ask why?"

"I am a creature placed in this world to create confusion, test the holy, and turn men aside from the path of enlightenment! Is that not reason enough? Defend yourself!"

Enyo considered this. "Pointless. Was it not the tengu who taught swordsmanship to the great Minamoto no Yoshitsune himself? I am no match for you; if it is your whim to kill me and my fate to die here at your hand, then so be it. Though I fail to see how this will prevent me from finding enlightenment, since I do not seek it."

The tengu just glared at him for several long moments. He did not lower his sword, but he did not use it either. "I was the servant girl who tempted you in vain; I was the yamabushi who tried to steer you away from these, in fact, quite holy mountains. I failed at both, so I will answer your question if you will answer one of mine. What is it you do seek?"

Enyo shrugged. "Nothing," he said.

The tengu relaxed his two-handed grip long enough to wag a finger disapprovingly at Enyo. "Don't try that trick with me. You shaved your head like a monk and took the habit of a yamabushi, and you came into my mountains!"

"Everyone must be somewhere. Shaving my head just ensured that my own Lord did not come looking for me like some wayward servant. I have not renounced the world—I just don't care about it. If you mean to kill me, then best get on with it. Otherwise I have a ways to go before nightfall."

The tengu smiled. "Aha! That implies a goal, and you said you wanted nothing!"

"I have a direction, not a goal," Enyo said. "I will follow this path until it reaches the villages I know are on the other side of these mountains. There I will either join a temple for a time or find work.

> **"I CONSIDER THE PAIN OF LOSS A SMALL PRICE TO PAY TO BE ABLE TO FEEL PAIN AGAIN."**

When I have supplies enough, I will go back on the trail until I come again to En."

"And then?" the tengu asked, but it had a sinking feeling that it already knew the answer.

"Why, I will do it all again."

The tengu lowered his sword, defeated for the moment. "Frankly, I was going to kill you since I didn't know what else to do. The truth makes my head hurt, but I swear if I kill you now the puzzle of you will wrack my wits for eternity."

"As you wish." Enyo walked past the tengu but the tengu merely fell into step beside him.

"I mean to accompany you until I have sorted you out," the tengu said.

"As you wish," Enyo repeated affably. "It's not as if I could prevent anything you wish to do."

The tengu sighed. "Yet you *have* and you *do*. To trick and dis-

tract a pious man is a tengu's highest calling."

"I can't help you, then. I am not a pious man," replied Enyo.

"So you say, yet what is the difference? You are tempted neither by gold nor the flesh. You have no desires to speak of. I've known the most holy of monks who cannot say the same."

Enyo shook his head, looking a little sad. "That is not piety. I have not renounced the world—I am merely indifferent to it, and that is not the same thing."

"It *looks* the same," the tengu said. "Is there truly nothing you want?"

Enyo hesitated then. It was a slight hesitation, hardly noticeable, but the tengu noticed it. "Well, I was wrong to say I wanted nothing. There is one thing."

"Is there anything I can do to induce you to tell me? Threaten you? Go away and leave you in peace?"

Enyo smiled then. "To tell the truth, I've had worse company than a tengu in my life, so stay or go as it pleases you. No need for inducement, I don't mind telling you. My problem is that I am indifferent to the world, as I said. I would like very much not to be."

The tengu frowned. "You would like to care again?"

"To care? To feel? Yes, I would. Insofar as I feel anything, I feel like a dead man. I want to engage the world, to feel as a normal man. I think we are not so different in that we both have fairly simple desires. You would like a yamabushi to tempt and bedevil, yes?"

The tengu sighed. "Such have been rather rare in these mountains of late. It's a vexing thing for a tengu."

Enyo nodded. "Then perhaps we can help one another. If you can bring me fully back to the world, I will renounce that world and become a yamabushi in truth as well as appearance. Then you may bedevil and play tricks on me to your heart's content."

The tengu just stared at him for a few moments. "But ... how am I to do that? And why would you want to re-engage the world of desire and *karma* only to leave it again?"

"As to the first, I have no idea. For the second, to pay the debt I would owe to you, and it makes perfect sense. I consider the pain of loss a small price to pay to be able to feel pain again. Or to feel anything, come to that."

The tengu had thought at first meeting that this man was going to be a challenge. The creature was finally beginning to understand just how right that was.

Enyo was now on his second trip through the mountains. He had reached Togakushi on the far side of the range without further incident, spent the winter in the temple there and in the spring resumed his journey back the way he had come.

Enyo didn't see the tengu again until he left the path to do some fishing in a slow moving stream he had found the year before. There, bathing in a small quiet pool, was an exquisite woman with pale skin and long black hair. Enyo was, frankly, a little disappointed.

"Is that the best you can do?"

The tengu didn't even pretend to be surprised that Enyo recognized him. He seemed to expect it. "You think I should be even more beautiful?" the tengu asked. "I'm not sure I can manage. Still, greed may be something of a breakthrough for you."

Enyo shook his head. "That's not what I meant! Didn't you try this before with the serving woman? I expected something different."

"This *is* different," the tengu said. "For a start, I am naked." He stood up in the water for Enyo to see. Enyo was forced to agree that creating a more beautiful face and form would be difficult indeed.

Enyo sighed. "You are quite fetching, but you must have known I'd expect something of the sort. In any case, you must know that a beautiful woman bathing alone in a mountain stream is, well, uncommon?"

"An illusion intended to be seen through. A trick, in other words. Tengu like tricks. Didn't I mention that?" The tengu rose dripping from the pool and walked toward him. Enyo stepped back but the tengu merely walked past him to the willow tree and dried itself with a square of cloth before putting on the kimono. Dressed, it was even more beautiful.

Enyo didn't look at the creature. "If the trick is over, you needn't keep that appearance."

"It is a tengu's nature to take different forms depending on its mood," it said, "nor am I obliged to conform to your expectations. Does my form bother you?"

"I said I'm no priest," Enyo admitted. "Flesh calls to flesh. I have an impulse to make love to you, and yet I still feel nothing. I would make love as a corpse, or an animal, with no savoring of the moment. I could not bear that. More, I would know that it was *you* in there and no woman at all."

The tengu nodded. "Good. The fact that you can be unsettled means that perhaps there is still a human soul in there."

Enyo didn't answer. He just baited his hook and dropped it into the water, then sat with his back against the tree.

"You're not looking at me," the tengu said after a bit.

"Of course not. I'm fishing."

"No, I mean you're deliberately avoiding looking at me. You look ahead, to the right, up, down. You do not look at me."

"Flesh calls to flesh, as I said."

The tengu dismissed that. "There's something to do with women that troubles you, right enough, but it's not desire in your eyes. It is great sadness. I saw the same thing when you looked at the servant girl before, though I didn't recognize it at the time."

"I don't feel sad. I don't feel anything."

"Call it a ghost of sadness then. A memory. What happened, Enyo-san? Were you unhappy in love?"

"I was never in love. Even before—" He stopped, looking a little bewildered and, the tengu thought, fearful.

"Before what?"

Enyo didn't answer, and after a while the tengu sighed. "You do realize, you know, that the best way to find something missing is to remember where you had it last."

"My emotions aren't a pair of chopsticks, tengu."

The tengu ignored that. "Did you lose your soul in the war?"

Now Enyo did look at the tengu again. "How did you know about the war?"

"While you were relaxing at the temple in Togakushi I adopted this form and went to your home village. Amazing how free men are with their conversation when a pretty girl is involved. They're still talking about you. They say you were present at the final destruction of the Taira clan at Dan-no-Ura. That you were a high-ranking warrior, greatly in favor among the Genji, who forsook it all to become a wandering monk."

"I was there," Enyo said, and that was all.

"That was a privilege many would envy," the tengu said. "To deliver the final stroke against the enemies of your clan? That must have been glorious."

Enyo repeated dully, "Now be silent. You're scaring the fish."

The Tengu smiled. "It didn't happen like that, did it? Not glorious at all. Was it?"

"Think what you want," Enyo said. He started to wind in his line. "You didn't catch anything."

"How could I, with you chattering on? You are really the most annoying creature."

"Thank you. It's what a tengu does best in the world. I was glad I could spoil your meditation."

"I wasn't meditating. I was fishing," Enyo said, frowning.

"Don't think you can fool me, Enyo-san. There's more than one path to contemplation."

There was a sudden pull on Enyo's line. When he finally pulled it in there was a nice fat fish clinging to his hook.

"So I guess you eat after all," the tengu said and then vanished.

Enyo did not see the tengu again for the remainder of that journey. Nor did he see the creature on the return crossing. Enyo thought he did, at one point, but the wandering monk turned out to be an actual wandering monk, on a journey of his own to the temple at Togakushi, a monk who thought Enyo was quite mad for trying to

pull his nose and see through a disguise that wasn't there. After that small misunderstanding was cleared up, they traveled together for a time, but the monk kept stopping at various mountain streams to meditate, which mostly involved standing under freezing cold water falls and shivering a lot and scaring away the fish Enyo hoped to catch for supper. When the path came to one of its few branchings, they finally took separate roads, both with some relief.

Where has that silly tengu got to? Has he forgotten our agreement?

Enyo was, to his own surprise, somewhat disappointed at that. Was he actually missing the tengu's company? It seemed so, but Enyo knew of nothing else to do save what he was already doing. It was only when he returned from Togakushi the following year that Enyo saw the tengu again. He knew it was the tengu. There was no other way to explain why a mature woman with a large sword would challenge him to a duel and interrupt his fishing.

"Tengu, what is the meaning of this?"

"Do you not recognize me?"

"I do. You are the tengu."

"I am the Emperor Antoku's grandmother."

Enyo took a deep, slow breath. "The Emperor's grandmother is dead. She died off the coast at Dan-No-Ura, along with the child himself and most of the rest of the Taira."

"True," said the tengu.

"Then why this deception?"

"Can you call it a deception if there was no chance you would believe it? I was giving you something real—or as real as I could manage—to fight."

Enyo just stared at the creature. "Now I see why you have been missing these last two years. You have gone mad."

The tengu laughed. "Not a bit. I left these mountains, disguised myself as a Minamoto retainer, and moved among them. That's why I was gone so long; this took time."

"For me? Why do such a thing?"

"To discover why you shaved your silly head, of course. You were being stubborn about the details. I chose the grandmother of the Emperor because I believe she is the root cause of your problem."

"You don't know that. You don't know anything."

"It's not the fact that she died. This was war, and people other than warriors tend to die as well. You knew that. Plus, in her machinations she could hardly be said to be uninvolved. She was a warrior too. Just of a different sort. I know what happened, Enyo-san. Shall I hear it from you, or shall we fight now?"

"I have no reason to fight you. I would have no reason to fight the Nun of the Second Rank if she really were alive. Her clan is finished."

"Yes. That's the frustrating thing, I imagine. That's why the presence of women disturbs you. You see it in them, don't you? Every time."

"See what, tengu?"

"You see the Nun of the Second Rank clutching the child Emperor on the deck of their ship and jumping into the water off Dan-No-Ura, at that time when all hope for the Taira was lost. You see her attendants and the women of her household following in proper order behind her. Going to their deaths as to a wedding."

"People die in war. You said as much yourself."

"And people kill in war. Which part had you forgotten?"

> "A man truly unaware can trip over enlightenment as well as a boot."

Enyo didn't answer for many long moments. "I forgot the reason I was there," he said softly. "I forgot the men I had killed, and the men who had tried to kill me. I forgot why the Minamoto and the Taira fought each other. I forgot everything, tengu. All I knew was what I saw in front of me, that it had all led to this moment. The women of the Taira clan drowned themselves before my eyes and they took part of me with them."

"And so you forgot yourself as well. A sad story, indeed. I'm quite moved to tears," the tengu said. "Now they say the fishermen taking crabs off Dan-No-Ura find faces on the back shells of the creatures, bumps and ridges mocking the appearance of the death-masks of the warriors that drowned there. Will the faces of the women appear as well, do you think? Frozen in the grimace of death as they were when the crabs feasted on their lovely, pale flesh?"

Enyo scowled. "If you're not going to help me, you can go away!"

"Help you? What do you think I've been doing for the past three years?" The tengu raised his sword. "Defend yourself."

"I won't. Kill me if you want. I won't fight you."

The tengu changed from the matriarch of the Taira into the appearance of the young woman who had bathed in the river. "Pity. An open and honest enemy is preferable to the demons you've unleashed on yourself. I think you want me to kill you."

"Perhaps. Anything would be better than the half-life I have now!"

The tengu smiled. "You're angry."

Enyo took a deep breath, let it out slowly. "Even a stone Buddha would be annoyed at your nonsense!"

"And why not? You're a yamabushi and I am a tengu. This is what we both do."

"I am not a yamabushi! Haven't you been listening!?"

"You were always a yamabushi, Enyo-san. You did fool me for a while, I must admit, but only because you fooled yourself so well. You confused your proper disgust and displacement from the world with a lack of emotion. Yet you were on the yamabushi path once you entered my mountains with the idea of regaining your lost humanity. Every act was a meditation, even fishing. Perhaps especially fishing. Whether you thought so or even intended to be what you've now become is really beside the matter."

"That's not true!"

"Shall we test this? Suppose I take off this kimono now and have a bath in front of you. What do you think would happen?"

"*Nothing*," Enyo said severely.

The tengu smiled. "Yes, and precisely nothing. But would it be the same sort of nothing? A man truly unaware can trip over enlightenment as well as a root. But don't worry—I'll be there to make sure that doesn't happen. Until next meeting, Enyo-san."

The tengu vanished then, leaving Enyo alone with his fishing. Enyo tried to calm down. He slowly realized that he *needed* to calm down.

Well.

Enyo wondered, just for a moment, if he should learn to meditate properly. It might help his composure when the tengu returned as, Enyo knew, the creature would. Talking more nonsense. Trying to trick him, because the tengu thought Enyo was something he was not.

Let the tengu find me chanting under a cold waterfall. Wouldn't that be a joke.

Enyo thought, perhaps, it was a joke that even a tengu could admire. Not that he wanted to give any real credence to the tengu's delusion that Enyo was a yamabushi. Surely one could not just "stumble" upon the path to enlightenment by accident, no matter what the silly creature said. Still, the tengu did feel that Enyo owed it a debt and perhaps it was right; Enyo wasn't really sure. Besides, he couldn't fish all the time, he had to find other ways to pass the seasons.

Enyo smiled then. A tengu wasn't the only one who could play tricks.

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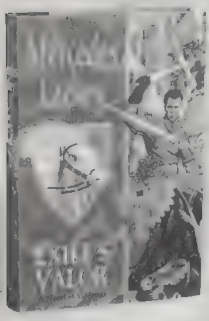

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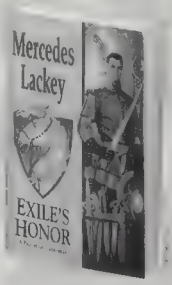

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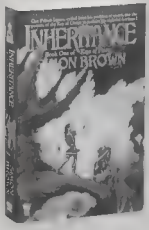

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By Eric T. Baker

You've seen the movie, now play *Pirates of the Caribbean.*

Pirates of the Caribbean *(above) for the Xbox and PC and the D&D supplement* Ghostwalk *(right) are reviewed in this column*

Pirates of the Caribbean for the Xbox and PC from Bethesda Softworks, the makers of Morrowind, is only tied in very loosely with the Disney movie and theme park ride of the same name. Keira Knightley, who plays Elizabeth Swann in the movie, provides the narration, and there is a pirate ship crewed by the undead loose in the virtual sea, but beyond those two points, the game is very much like Bethesda's other pirate game, *Sea Dogs*, which is a good thing.

In *PotC*, the player takes the role of Captain Nathaniel Hawk and guides his initially modest ship about the islands and towns of the Caribbean during the golden age of piracy. Six factions (the English, French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, and pirates) control the many ports and ships, and the player determines how Hawk will interact with the factions. Helping any one faction hurts Hawk's standing with the others.

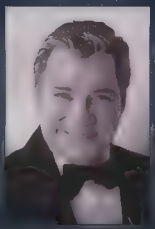
The mechanics of the game involve sailing Hawk's ship from place to place. Encounters at sea with other ships can result in conflict during which the player controls first the ship's guns and maneuvers, and then Hawk himself if boarding takes place. Hawk can capture ships and sell them for money or keep them to make up a fleet. Besides fighting, the player can also have Hawk transport cargo, which makes good money if the player can keep it from the sea's predators.

The hallmark of Bethesda games is their open-endedness. The goal of the game is to make Hawk powerful and wealthy, but it is pretty much up to the player to decide whether to complete the game's offered quests, or to strike out alone. Either way, *PotC* is a fun way to recreate high seas adventure.

Ratchet and Clank Go Commando from Sony Computer Entertainment America for the PS2 is the sequel to last year's excellent *Ratchet and Clank*, essentially a platform shooting and jumping game rendered in 3-D. Ratchet is an alien who looks like a bunny, and Clank is his robot buddy. With Clank on his back, Ratchet saved the universe in the first game. The second game shows the heroes trying to enjoy their success, only to be called on to perform heroics once again.

This game looks great. It has a cartoony character and setting design that is in perfect keeping with the background and characters. Ratchet crushes or blasts enemies, picking up parts that Clank

SET PHASERS TO FUN



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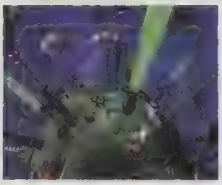
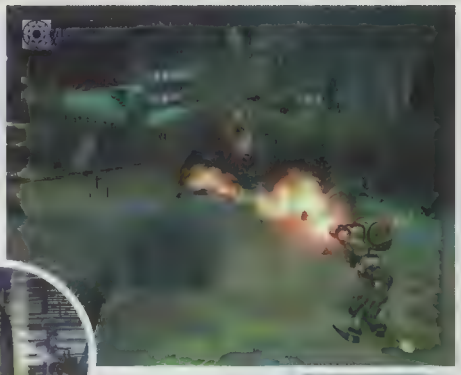
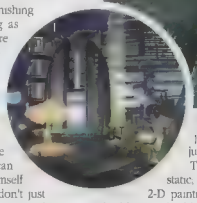




converts into new weapons and armor that allow Ratchet to take on ever more dangerous and numerous enemies. The heroes perform on levels where buildings are spheres that they can run all around or where towers climb into the vanishing point distance, receding as they climb them. There are also boss battles and survivor challenges in arenas and other forms.



By the time the player has completed the game, he or she will have found 19 different weapons for Ratchet, who can improve 18 of them, just as he can spend eps to improve himself. The upgraded weapons don't just become longer, faster, or stronger, they actually change appearance and function as they get better, improving from a lava thrower to a meteor caster to cite one example.

Like the 2-D scrollers from which Ratchet and Clank naturally descend, the object of the game is to test the player's hand eye coordination and to provide lots and lots of things to shoot. *R&CGC* does a great job of keeping this formula fun for the duration of the game.

Unlimited Saga from Square for the PS2 is a surprise. Despite being from the same company, it seems to have more in common with the early episodes of *Final Fantasy* than the recent ones. The lavish animation and 3-D game play that are the staple of the latest *FF* games are nowhere to be found in *US*, which is itself a long-running RPG franchise.

Players can start the game as one of seven characters: Laura, a former pirate; Mythe, an inventor and playboy; Kurt, a knight; Judy, a 10-year-old witch; Ventus, a mail carrier; Ruby, a teenage fortuneteller; and Armic, a chapa (basically a large, intelligent squirrel with thumbs) tribesman. Each character has its own history and starts out in search of different things, but the quests often intertwine. The other starting characters usually show up as NPCs in the game, often joining the player's party just like other NPCs.

The game play is largely static; towns are presented by 2-D paintings. Players move from building to building by highlighting and selecting them. Dialogue takes place between static portraits of the speaking characters. Travel from one town to another is over a 2-D map that gives no hint of what is contained in each node.

The only time *US* breaks out of its 2-D mode is for combat, which takes place in the now more familiar 3-D mode. Combat is in turns with the players selecting attacks and targets—several at a time if they desire. Resolution depends on the attack and the defense and various powerups, but it is randomized by use of a sort of roulette wheel that the player tries to stop on a good number.

The key to enjoying *US* is knowing what to expect going in. Players expecting the cinema that is a *FF* game will be disappointed, but those content with good role playing in the Japanese mode will enjoy it.

The Magic Box is the latest supplement for the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game* from Eden Studios. It is an extremely useful supplement considering that most campaigns are only going to have one or at most two (well, not more than three probably) Slayers. The game's drama points do a good job of giving non-Slayer characters an

important role in most adventures, but for lots of players, having a character with real power is what gaming is all about.

Enter magic. *TMB* expands on the magic rules from the core rulebook and lets players create witches, warlocks, dabblers, psychics, and superscientists. And it gives the game master the resources to create villains from these character types, often people who great power has drawn to the black half of magic, a fate that is also a threat to players' characters.

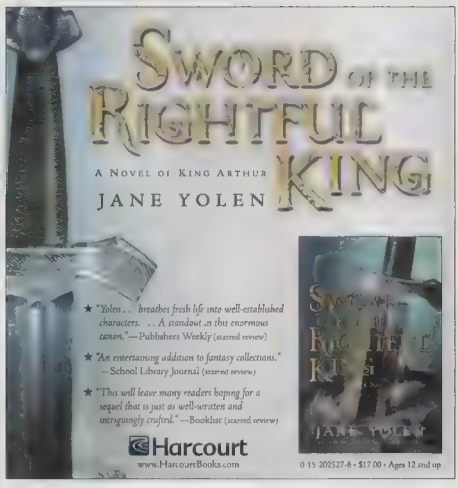
The book starts with a chapter on the history of magic and the supernatural in the Buffyverse. Next comes new ideas, Qualities, Drawbacks, and Archetypes for creating magic and superscience-based characters. This chapter also contains the fully statted up characters sheets for Willow, Tara, Amy (+2 Attractiveness for all three of them? When Anya is a +3?), and Giles. The following chapters cover descriptions and statistics for the spells, rituals, and items of mystical power that appeared in the TV show. There are also rules for creating new spells and magical items. The penultimate chapter is devoted to psychic powers and other paranormal and science abilities, while the final chapter is a complete scenario suitable as a stand-alone or for an ongoing campaign.

In a game line where all the books have been welcome, useful additions, *TMB* is truly a book that no one who plays should be without.

Ghostwalk from Wizards of the Coast is one of the strangest campaign supplements ever created for *Dungeons & Dragons*. The book describes the city of Manifest. What is special about this city is that it rests atop ruins from ancient times and those ruins lie on top of the entrance to the land of the dead. Due to its location, it has become a city where the living and the dead dwell side by side. These are the restless dead, lingering in physical form rather than passing through the Veil and finding their eternal fate.

To make Manifest a playable city, *Ghostwalk* contains rules for playing ghost characters. It describes the new eidolon and eidoloncer classes, which allow characters playing ghosts to rise in level and ghostly powers just as normal, living classes do. For those living characters, there are four new prestige classes. In addition, the supplement contains 70 new feats and 65 new spells, plus new magic items and relics. To get the campaign started, there are three complete encounters and four detailed encounter sites with 14 new monsters to make them interesting.

While it can be played as a stand-alone,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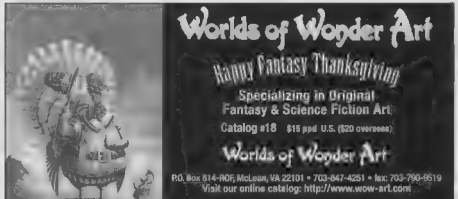
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Ghostwalk probably works best in a campaign where the players think things have gotten too humdrum. This supplement is anything but.

Nyambe: African Adventures, a d20 supplement from Atlas Games, is a different sort of exotic. Not concentrated in one city, Nyambe is the name of a vast land full of strange creatures and brand-new cultures. Characters will encounter ancestral orishas (spirits) who cry for tribal warriors to punish mchawi (evil aligned) wizards, as well as dragon blooded sorcerers and the Amazons of Nibomay. In short, the supplement is a combination of high fantasy and African myth, legend, and history.

Included in the book are 12 human tribal cultures and six nonhuman races such as the brown skinned and tailed Wakvambi elves who dwell in the Ilda rainforest. There are core-class variants and prestige classes, variations that transpose druids into shape-changing shamen worshipping the orisha. The new skills and feats include Ancestral Blessing, Drum Dancer, Elephant Warrior, Fire Blood, and more. The new weapons, armor and equipment all have helpful pictures so players can visualize them. There are new spells and magic items such as zombi powder and ritual masks that transform the wearer temporarily into a spirit. There are even voodoo nkisi statues that can curse their users as easily as their targets.

The supplement also contains new beasts and many special rules for the climate and ecology of Nyambe. All the book really lacks is a formal adventure or three to get the players started, but there are many hooks for the game masters to build their own adventures around.

Dark Inheritance is a second d20 campaign, but this one is from Mythic Dreams Studios and is set in the modern day. Its background is that the Human Genome Project discovers "GodGenes" and that the existence of these markers of a divine past blurs the boundaries between science and magic. When a catastrophe destroys Jerusalem and replaces it with an ancient, ruined, magical city, the GodGenes are activated and the genetic heirs to the gods and monsters of legend are suddenly loose in the world of today.

Characters in this world play Titans, people born with the genetic legacy of the ancients, which come in five different flavors. Players can explore an ancient world on the other side of the Rip, or they can stay in our world and try to adapt to its changing face. Those who stay will meet organizations like the secret, black ops government agency, Project Titan, or the ancient and inscrutable Promethean Order.

The rulebook contains all that is needed to roll up and adjudicate the mystical birthrights and Legacy feats that are the powers of Titans. There are new advanced classes, feats, and monsters galore.

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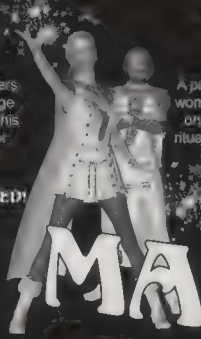

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GOT MAGIC?

divided

Continued from page 65

I could leap into the sky and fly around like a bird. I could see everything, and I could touch down anywhere I wanted. Or I could never touch down at all. I could just ride the wind forever."

The ache in Donny's chest grew acute. He set down the duffel and took her hand. They stood like that for several minutes, staring out over a city frozen in time, and Donny thought that he had never felt anything so comfortable. She turned her head to look at him, and after a moment she put her arms around him and laid her head against his chest. Donny's breath caught in his throat. He felt the moment would never end, as if they were preserved now as specimens, preserved in the evening's rich amber, and if he never took another breath it wouldn't matter because all he needed to keep him alive was her arms around him and her heartbeat against his and her breath on his skin.

They spent several days wandering their silent sunset world, and as they laughed and played tag and switched the hats on tourists, she told him all she had learned and thought and felt since coming to Jerusalem to study. He in turn shared many of the details of his journey, and he was pleased to see that she didn't disbelieve.

After seeing all there was to see and sampling everything the silent markets had to offer, they found themselves roving the Mount of Olives, wandering almost obliviously past the colorful Church of All Nations and the stately Russian Church of Saint Mary Magdalene. They passed by the Mosque of the Ascension and the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, drawn as if by some gentle natural force to a shady oasis thick with flowers and massive olive trees—the Garden of Gethsemane. There they sat with their backs against one of the great trees and held each other in the perpetual sunset. After a time Donny opened his duffel and brought out some of the gifts he had collected on his trek. Her eyes grew a bit wider at each small marvel: vibrant anemone fish from the Pacific Islands, a few tiny sea dragons from Indonesia, carved tusks of ivory from Nepal, pendants of clear green Burmese jade, a swatch of fine Thai silk, wonderful horrors from the depths of the ocean. He found himself lost in her growing delight.

She set the gifts aside and kissed him softly, then settled back in his arms to watch the neverending sunset. "I plan to stay here, you know," she said.

"Right here?" Donny asked playfully.

"Palestine—Israel, yes. I've applied for another renewal of my student visa. Maybe I'll even try for citizenship."

He turned her around. Staring deep into her eyes, the ache in his chest changed to something very different. On the Eighty-eight Steps he had learned to read the secrets written in a lover's eyes, and now he saw that she could not conceive of choosing between the Holy Land and him. Her love for both was fierce and innocently selfish. She had not yet learned that the world would not always bend to her will.

He felt a coldness in his belly and a constriction in his throat. He could not stay, he realized with bitterness. He could not stay, and he wanted her to come with him. But he saw that if she left Jerusalem, a part of her would die.

"You'll stay too, won't you?" she asked, and there was determination behind the question. "I mean, you went through so much just to well, just to find me."

Her words frightened him. Rather than answer, he stroked her hair, then pulled her to him and held her tightly. He had seen her through three bad breakups in Salt Lake City, and it galled him now to put himself on the other side of the equation—the last place he had ever wanted to be, in the company of those foolish boys he had so despised, inflicting their careless wounds. But the thing that would have allowed him to stay was sitting in a cigar box on a shelf beneath a dusty counter in a little oddment shop somewhere on the other side of the world.

Minutes or hours or days of nontime passed. The beautiful young woman fell asleep in his arms. Gently he extricated himself from her embrace and made a pillow of soft grass for her head. He strapped the glass tank into place on his back. Carefully he packed all his gifts back into the bottomless satchel and laid it beside her at the base of the olive tree. When he knelt to kiss her goodbye, his tears ran from his cheeks to hers like rivers of molten bronze in the endless sunset.

When he left, bound for Alexandria, he didn't look back. For the sleeping young woman in the Garden of Gethsemane, sunset slowly turned to twilight, twilight faded to dusk, and dusk was overtaken by night.

1

The young woman pushed open the door to the gloomy old miscellany shop. She carried a threadbare olive-drab duffel at her side. The air inside the shop was dry and had no smell, as if it had lain undisturbed for so long that it had settled to the floor as dust. The shelves overflowed with cast off relics of the postwar era—faded movie posters, thick black phonograph records, battered hubcaps and license plates, boxes of old campaign buttons, rubber-banded stacks of baseball cards, transistor radios, cigarette lighters, stereoscopes—things that might be pleasantly nostalgic to some but which she seemed to regard as junk.

On the counter sat a motor-driven cash register of galvanized steel, with a chrome service bell beside it. Behind the counter stood a short, stocky man, his face lit eerily from the side by an electric floor lamp. "Evening, lass," he said. "And what can I help you with?"

The young woman's haunted eyes turned inward for a moment. Then, in a sudden fluid motion, she slammed the duffel down on the counter. "I need to find the man you sold this to."

The ghost of a smile touched the shopkeeper's lips, and the few streaks of gray in his hair gleamed like silver. "The lad was right," he said, shaking a finger at her. "I recognize you—yes, I do. What a pleasure it is to meet you! Though properly speaking I didn't sell him this item at all. It was a gift."

Grace seized the shopkeeper's wrist with manic force, pulling him forward over the counter until his face was in shadow. "Where is he?" she demanded, shaking, as if scrabbling for a purchase on civility.

The shopkeeper removed his arm from her grasp. "I'd venture you've seen him more recently than I have. It must be two years since he was here."

"I need to find him. You must have something."

"He travels outside of time," said the shopkeeper, spreading his palms. "His supply is dwindling, yes, but he's a clever boy. It wouldn't surprise me if he's figured out how to recharge it by now. In any case, lass, it would take a miracle to find him. Even with a magic carpet, which I'm always out of, anyway."

The word leaked out of her like an exhausted swimmer's last breath: "Please."

It might have been the tremors of despair in her voice, or the shadows clustered deep in her sea-blue eyes. Or it might simply have been the peculiar magic of a beautiful, desperate woman. Whichever, the shopkeeper stood silent for a moment, head down. "All right, OK," he said at last. "I shouldn't do this, but I've got something here that might help. Free of charge, if you want it."

Grace leaned anxiously across the counter. "What is it? Let me see."

The shopkeeper bent and retrieved a dusty old cigar box from beneath the counter. Reverently, he opened the lid. Inside was a yellowing sheet of parchment, folded neatly. But when he looked into Grace's lovely, hopeful face, he shook his head sadly and put the box away again. "No, I can't do it." He dropped onto a low stool. "They'll have my license, but there's only so much irony I can stand."

Looking confused and betrayed, Grace wiped her eyes.

The shopkeeper sighed and levered himself to his feet. "Here, lass," he said wearily, "let's do some checking out back. See if we can't scare up a miracle."

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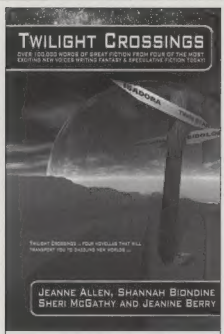
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past lives

Continued from page 44

Victorian ladies' clothing. The Victorians invented aniline dyes and had access to colors not found in nature. They tended to use them in alarming combinations, too, mostly because they could. Victorian ladies loved loud stripes, plaids (there was a nostalgic fad for all things Highland), and paisleys.

Victorian Daywear and Vintage Western

Putting together a Victorian ladies' costume for daytime and casual events is trickier than for formal occasions, simply because it's hard to find dresses of the right style in casual fabrics. For the gentlemen, it can be easier. This was also the time of the working cowboy and the western pioneer in the United States, so cowboy shooters are really doing Victorian costuming of a specialized kind.

In town, men wore frock coats, vests in fancy fabrics, starched white shirts, and cravats or string ties. The cravats are hard to fake, but not expensive to buy; there are several online sources for period western wear that offer them. The frock coats were much like the modern ones in formal wear stores, buttoning high up the chest, with a skirt that stopped just above the knee. No back pockets on the trousers, remember. They also wore sack suits, with jackets like those of modern business suits but not fitted at the waist, and buttoning high up the chest.

Beware the modern cowboy boot; it's very different from its ancestors. Boots of the period had square or round toes and hardly any decorative stitching—not unlike the Fry boots that don't look right at the Renaissance Fair. Men and women also wore lace-up leather boots that stopped above the ankle. Guys, if you have work boots in your closet, they may do just fine. Ladies may want something a little more refined, but since lace-up ankle boots have been in fashion for a while, they won't be hard to find new or used. Avoid the kind with padded ankle collars, though.

And of course, moccasins and moccasin boots are appropriate footwear for the frontiersman or woman who wants a lighter, softer shoe or boot.

Even if you're cowboying up, you still can't wear modern blue jeans and look authentic, sad to say. Mr. Levi's first indigo denim miners' pants didn't look much like those 501s in your closet. But sturdy twill or canvas pants with the back pockets and the belt loops cut off will make pretty convincing work pants for a late 1800s costume. You can find suspenders at costume or thrift shops or sometimes even at discount department stores. If you want to be extra-accurate, find button-on suspenders and sew suspender buttons to the waistband of your trousers.

The most widely accepted work shirt is one that opens partway down the front with a button placket, with a band or foldover collar. But there were also shirts available that opened all the way to the hem. Just don't get one with button-down collar points. Fabrics include solid colors, stripes, checks, and calico in small-scale prints.

You'll want a neckerchief, sometimes called a "wild rag" in cowboy circles. It can be as humble as a cotton bandanna, or as fancy as a big silk square. Like the Regency neckcloth, there are dozens of ways to wear it.

And you'll need a hat. Neither men nor women left the house without one in the 1800s (and men took theirs off upon entering a building, or when meeting a lady). There are a few period-incorrect hats in the world, but hundreds of correct ones. Top hats for dress or business, derbies, straw hats for farmers, battered squashy fedoras, and big-brimmed felts galore for cowboys and working men.

Ladies, if you can't find a hoop or bustle dress for day wear, remember that women on the frontier didn't have time for that foolishness. They wore long, loose, one-piece dresses with high necklines and long sleeves, called Mother Hubbards, and cinched them in with a wide belt or an apron. Mother Hubbards prevented sunburn, were comfortable in the hot prairie wind, and were easy to sew at home. You may find the perfect thing among the nightgowns in the lingerie section. Or you could wear a long, gathered skirt and high-necked, long-sleeved blouse, again with a wide belt, and add a shawl for cool days. You'll pass for a frontierswoman. A big straw hat or a wide-brimmed felt one will keep the sun off your face and substitute for the harder-to-find sunbonnet or the fancy milliner-made bonnet.

The Last Few Tips

Remember that in any era you have the option of ethnic costume as well. I have a friend who plays a Moor at the Minnesota Renaissance Festival, complete with turban and embroidered robes. You might be a gypsy or a Lakota woman or a Scottish Highlander or a Chinese shopkeeper, if you find the right clothing and like to do the roleplaying.

Keep your eyes open in thrift shops, yard sales, vintage clothing stores, museum stores, import shops—anywhere clothes are sold. Watch for sales at costume rental places and for theaters that are closing or reducing their costume inventory.

There is a potential hazard to all this costuming, and I wouldn't be doing you any favors if I didn't mention it. How are you fixed for closet space? More than one of my friends has chosen an apartment or house because it had enough room to store the historical clothing collection. I know, you're all sensible, rational people. Just don't say I didn't warn you.

(If you'd like to pass along your own costuming ideas, or alert me to historical recreation events around the country that *Realms of Fantasy* readers would enjoy, please send mail or e-mail to me, care of the magazine: *Realms of Fantasy*, 441 Carlisle Dr., Herndon, VA 20170. lcleveland@sovhomestead.com) ❧

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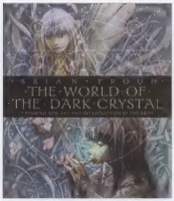

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